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A GIRL WITH A FORTUNE
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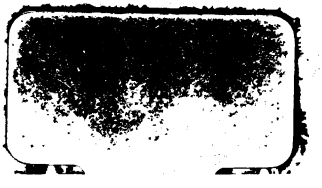

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CAMIOLA

A GIRL WITH A FORTUNE

BY

JUSTIN McCARTHY, M.P.

AUTHOR OF "DEAR LADY DISDAIN," "MISS MISANTHROPE,"
"A HISTORY OF OUR OWN TIMES," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES
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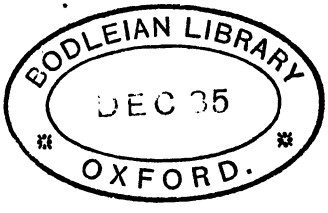
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CAMIOLA.

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. POLLEN'S ALBANIAN.

ALBERT ROMONT had followed out his purpose and gone to see his mother in the country. His mother had always been his best friend. In her company he found himself a boy, a mere boy, once again. She had married when little more than a child, and she used to say with Goethe's mother that she and her sons were young together. Her eldest son had now been for some time married, and had other loves and interests; and she had always been fonder of her younger boy. Bertie Romont had got into the way of going to his mother when anything in particular

had happened, or was likely to happen, either for good or ill; and he confided in her as a schoolboy might in his chosen comrade. This time, however, he did not tell his mother what was in his mind; and partly for the reason that there was hardly anything definite to tell. Was he in love with Camiola Sabine? Why, he had hardly seen the girl half a dozen times. He had had but one single talk with her alone—they two alone, and that talk was about nothing. He knew next to nothing about her; he really knew nothing more about her now than he knew the first day he saw her. Surely he could not tell his mother, he could not admit to himself, that he was in love with a girl under such conditions; a girl, too, who was in love with another man, and was going, no doubt, to marry him. One might as well believe at once in the poetic fables about love at first sight.

Exactly; but then arose in his mind the very practical question: Had he not fallen in love at first sight? Was he ever the same after the day when he entered Lady

Letitia's drawing-room for the first time and his eyes rested on Camiola Sabine? It is all very well to slight the poetic fable; but how about the personal fact? Why was he now so jealous of poor Georgie Lisle? Why did he think the boy such a presumptuous nuisance? Why were his thoughts always fixed on Camiola and the place where she was staying? Why had Fitzurseham suddenly become a sacred spot for him? Why did he care so little now about anything he used to care for? "If this be not falling in love," he said to himself, somewhat ruefully, "it is a confoundedly good imitation of it; as Mercutio says, 'It will serve.'"

One thing was clear; he must not let this be known, even to his mother. Miss Sabine would no doubt be married to Georgie Lisle, and Romont did not mean to play the absurd part of a hopeless lover where he had really not the slightest right to fall in love. He took it for granted that Camiola was engaged to Georgie Lisle before he ever saw her face, and it would be merely a gratuitous insult to her if he were now to let it be known that he

had fallen in love with her. "It is a case of every one dragging his own corpse out," Romont said to himself, adopting a once famous American saying. "I have simply to drag my own corpse out of this, and let no one be any the wiser. I have made a fool of myself, but only of myself, and only I myself am aware of the fact—and only I myself have a right to scold myself, or laugh at myself, or pity myself." He played his part so well that even his mother did not suspect for a moment that anything was the matter with her boy. But she was not over pleased when he told her that he was going abroad for a short time. She would have wished him to stay with her.

Up to this time Romont had known none of the troubles of life; no, not one. His father died when the younger son was too young a child to feel the loss, and since that time he had seen only happiness and known only affection. He ought, according to all received ideas, to have turned out a very selfish and unworthy person for lack of the adversity which is esteemed necessary to

chasten and purify the character. But certain natures have a certain way of taking their own road without regard to axiom; and prosperity had made Romont unselfish, sweet, and sympathetic. His mother had, indeed, as Mrs. Pollen put it, "spoiled him very nicely." She had indulged his Quixotic whimsies, and allowed all that was generous, brave, and self-sacrificing in his nature to grow at its will. Whatever may be said to the contrary, it is certain that there are natures which become their very best in the constant sunlight of happiness, as there are others which, like some grapes, thrive only with the snow on them. A sort of sweet wilfulness, which he got from his mother, lent a semi-poetic, almost feminine qualification to the straightforward manhood of Romont's general character. He always felt for the troubles of others. He had got into the way of regarding himself as a being happily exempt from trouble of his own, and for that reason free to take constant thought for those who were not so happy. Thus he got out of life all it had to give him, and would have

been well content under such conditions to live on for ever. The love which now disturbed and distracted him was his first experience of mental pain.

While he was thus perturbed, longing for something to do and not well knowing what to do, he received a telegram from Mrs. Pollen. It merely asked him to come back to town and see her at once. It told him nothing. It was a relief to him to be asked to do anything at once. He made a hurried explanation to his mother; indeed, it was not much of an explanation, for he could only tell her that he had to go to London—he did not himself know why; and he went off by the next train. The telegram had been dated from Fitzurse House, and he assumed, therefore, that it was at Fitzurse House he was expected. He found Mrs. Pollen alone in her music-room, playing to herself on the organ.

"So kind of you to come at once," she said. "But I knew you would come when I asked you."

"Oh, of course I would come."

"I have just been thinking of something said by Jean Paul Richter about music—I wonder if any one even in Germany reads Jean Paul now? He says that music alone of all the arts can only express what is good. Do you think that is so? Can music not express hate and passion and wild anger?"

"I have not thought the matter over," Romont said with entire gravity. "But I will turn my attention to it if you wish." He understood Mrs. Pollen's ways, and he never thought of pushing her on to an explanation of her reason for asking him to come to London. He could wait. She would tell him when she felt inclined.

"I wish you would think it over; I am much interested in it; and I can't but think that Richter was wrong. Surely one can express the passion of hate as well as the passion of love in music?"

"Perhaps what Richter meant was that one cannot express in music anything that is ignoble and mean. Envy, for instance. How could one get the idea of envy out of the sound of an organ?"

"Well, it is something worth thinking over. I didn't send for you to London to talk about that alone."

"No; I suppose not."

"Camiola Sabine was here last night. She came alone."

"Yes," he answered, with almost perfect composure.

Mrs. Pollen rose from her place at the organ. "Give me your hand; I want to feel your pulse."

He complied. She held his wrist.

"Camiola came to tell me something. She came to tell me that she has promised to marry Georgie Lisle. That will do—it is just as I supposed. Your face is firm enough, my dear boy, but your pulse tells its tale." She let his hand drop. "There, you need not explain or protest; I knew it before."

He did not explain or protest. "Well, Mrs. Pollen, if my pulse told you that I was surprised at this, my pulse told you an untrue story. I was not surprised; I was expecting it; I knew it would come; I

thought it was something of the kind you had to tell me."

She knew it then! Mrs. Pollen knew his secret; it was no secret; he had betrayed himself in some way; he could not even have the poor satisfaction of thinking that he had dragged his corpse out, as he had hoped to do!

"Will you do nothing for her? Nothing, nothing?"

"What can I do? What could I do for her? Does she want anything done for her? Does she want my help? Would she have it?"

"Look here, Bertie Romont, and come to the point. Do you love this girl or not? Are you really in love with her?"

"As if you didn't know!" he said passionately. "I *am* in love with her; I would do anything for her; I would give my life to please her. I hate the thought of her marrying *him;* I should hate it even if I knew she loved him and that it would make her happy. See what selfish creatures we are! Ask me if I love her!"

"And yet you will do nothing! You will see her sacrifice herself to that hysterical boy, and you look on with your arms folded and will do nothing! If I were a man, I would rather kill him than see this hideous sacrifice."

"But, great Heaven," Romont exclaimed, "what is the good of my being in love with her? What right does that give me over her? What right should I have to kill her lover, if these were days for killing off one's rivals? She doesn't care about me."

"You of little faith!" Mrs. Pollen said scornfully. "Have you asked her?"

"No; not likely. Why should I ask her? Hasn't she engaged herself to him! Why, don't you remember; didn't we see her kiss him that night? Didn't that tell us her story?"

"It didn't tell me her story; I learnt it afterwards." Then Mrs. Pollen stopped and pulled herself up. She was on the point of letting out Camiola's secret; but she bethought herself in time. Mrs. Pollen was, above all things, a good "pal," and, although

she had not any great affection for women in general, yet she had a strong feeling of her sex, and she would not tell even Romont what she had found out about Camiola. "Let him find that out for himself," she thought; "he is not worthy of that girl, or of any girl, if he can't do that much." Her manner became instantly more quiet. "Well," she said, "I have my doubts about the whole thing. I can't bring myself to believe that such a girl really is in love with such a man. She might as well dress him in her apparel and make him her waiting-gentlewoman, as Beatrice says——"

"Oh, I think he's a plucky little fellow, so far as that goes."

"I dare say he is—most schoolboys are—but a plucky little fellow isn't quite enough for a girl like Camiola Sabine. Well, the point is this—are you, Mr. Romont, disposed to study the matter for yourself, to satisfy your own mind as to whether she is in love with him or not? You will have to lose no time."

"But how can I find out? She is engaged

to him. I can't go and ask a girl, 'Do you really want to marry the man you have promised to marry?' It would be an insult."

"Is there no other way?"

"I don't know of any."

"Can't you think of any?"

He shook his head.

"Well," she said impatiently, "I wouldn't for any consideration on earth be as resourceless as a man in a difficulty. Why was not I made a man and a lover? Only I suppose I should be as dull as the rest of you in that case—and you, Bertie Romont, who could put yourself into all sorts of disguises and go through all sorts of dangers for some unfortunate creatures you never knew anything about before, can't think of anything to do to save the girl you love from a fate which, to me, an unconcerned looker-on, seems twenty times worse than death by fever or any other sort of death."

"Do tell me," Romont said perplexedly, "what you mean; what you think I ought to do, what I could do. I am dull; I am stupid; I can't think of anything; I can't even guess

what you have in your mind. Pray have pity on my stupidity and tell me."

"Will you put yourself in my hands?"

"I will," he answered doggedly, and thrusting his hands deep into his pockets.

"Absolutely and unconditionally?"

"Absolutely and unconditionally; I know I can trust to anything you say."

"You are right in that, my dear boy. Just let me think for a moment. Don't you find that to strike a few chords on the organ greatly helps one in thinking a thing out—at least, that it gives inspiration sometimes? I do."

She went back to the organ, sat down, and touched the keys. Romont leaned with his back against the chimney-piece and looked at her. He was intensely grateful to her even while much puzzled by her. "Good Heaven, how kind she is!" he thought, in a sort of ecstasy of gratefulness for the interest she took in him. "After my mother," he said to himself, "she is the dearest and best friend I have on earth." But he did not say this aloud. Even in the fervour of his

gratitude he had a tolerably clear idea that it would not absolutely delight Mrs. Pollen to be classified with his mother. Truly a sincere woman of forty may well take a motherly interest in a young man, and may say so: but it would not be well for him to tell her that he regards her in the light of a mother.

Mrs. Pollen kept on playing for a few moments. Then she suddenly looked round and, with her hand still on the keys, said to him—

"You have heard me talk of my Albanian servant, Joseph, have you not; the man who was with me, first, in Greece, and afterwards in Syria?"

"Yes; I remember your telling me something about him."

"His real name is not Joseph; only the Albanian equivalent for it. I turned it into English, because I don't speak Albanian. He is coming to England."

"Oh, indeed?" Romont did not find himself deeply interested in the movements of Joseph, but he assumed that Mrs. Pollen

was merely talking about anything to give herself time to think.

"Yes; I want to get him a place with some one who is travelling, as I don't propose just now to travel myself. He would rather stay with me; but I think he would only stagnate in London. I have a great regard for him; and I want him to do well. I suppose you don't particularly want an Albanian servant?"

"Well, no, Mrs. Pollen. You see, my man has been with me a long time, and we get on very well together, and he knows all my ways; and——"

"Yes, yes, I quite understand; I never, of course, meant to suggest that you should send him away, but I thought that if you were inclined to have another servant——"

"I am afraid I am not rich enough for such a luxury."

"Well, perhaps you could help me to find a place for my Joseph. The worst of it is he can't speak one word of English or understand half a word. He speaks only some dreadfully bad Italian and some almost un-

intelligible French, or lingo that he calls French. I can do with him because I am used to his jargon. Anyhow, he is coming to London; I expect him to-morrow, and he will stay here until I get him a place or unless I get him a place. He is devoted to me, and I am devoted to him. That reminds me that I must send some one to meet him, for he has never been in London before, and he never could find his way or make a cabman understand him. Would you kindly ring the bell, Mr. Romont?"

He did so, wondering what had become of his love affair and her plans on his behalf.

A servant made his appearance. "Would you be good enough to ask Mr. Pilgrim kindly to come here for a moment?"

She said nothing to Romont. Romont remained silent as a statue. "Best to let her have her way," he thought.

Christian Pilgrim made his appearance.

"Oh, Mr. Pilgrim, I want you to go to-morrow evening and meet the train from Dover, and look out for an Albanian servant

of mine who is coming here. I think I told you of him once or twice?"

"Yes, madame."

"Well, he is coming here from Corfu, and he can't speak a word of English. He talks a little bad French; you can speak French, Mr. Pilgrim, can't you?"

"In a sort of way, madame."

"That will do well enough. Just take hold of him and bring him here. You will have to speak distinctly and slowly—but really it will be almost enough if you mention my name. Just say, 'Madame Pollen,' and he will come with you. I may see you to-morrow; but if I shouldn't be here until late you will remember, won't you?"

"Certainly, madame."

"Look here," Romont said, "can't I do this for you? I am afraid Pilgrim's French is a little too good, too literary, too much got out of books, to be intelligible to our Levantine."

"But you have positively to leave town to-morrow early," Mrs. Pollen said. "How could you manage to do this?"

Romont had not said a word about leaving town early next day. But he took care not to contradict her.

"I am sure I shall not find any difficulty," Pilgrim said. "My French will be quite as bad as his."

"Oh yes, it will be all right," Mrs. Pollen said. "Thank you very much, Mr. Pilgrim."

Mr. Pilgrim bowed and left the room.

"Now," said Mrs. Pollen, turning sharply round to Romont, "you begin to see, don't you?"

"I give you my word, Mrs. Pollen," he replied with the utmost gravity, "that the blind fish in the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky couldn't be more absolutely in the dark than I am. What on earth has this worthy Albanian personage got to do with me and my difficulties? Is he a magician? Is there such a person at all; and why does he come in to interrupt our councils just at this moment?"

Mrs. Pollen laughed a laugh of gratified good humour.

"I am always delighted," she said, "when

I puzzle clever men, and make them look stupid. You look *so* stupid just now."

"I don't believe I look half as stupid as I am."

"Well, I must take pity on your stupidity, as you put it yourself a moment or two ago. I must explain to you." She gave him some explanation, not much. He listened with interest, and sometimes with surprise, occasionally looking curiously into her face, as if not quite certain whether she was altogether in earnest.

"That is enough," she said at last, "for you to know for the present. Further instructions will come hereafter, according as they are wanted. I don't mean to pay out too much cable all at once. You will do this?"

"Oh yes," he said; "certainly. I am pledged to you. I do not quite see as yet——"

"Of course you don't; who ever supposed you would? But you will see in time, always supposing that you open your eyes and do as I tell you; and, for Heaven's sake, don't ask too many questions."

"Just one question at least. Does your Albanian friend dress like one of Byron's Albanians? Does he go kirtled to the knee?"

"Oh no; he dresses like a sailor—like the sailor of an English yacht. He was a sailor, and he used to wear the uniform of my husband's yacht when he had one; but lately he has just worn the dress of an ordinary sailor."

"All right," Romont said, after a moment's pause, "I'll take charge of him. I am glad to be doing anything. I couldn't endure idleness in my present mood. You are a dear friend, Mrs. Pollen, and whether this hits or misses I shall thank you all the same. I am afraid you are mistaken; but in any case I can't be worse than I am, and I owe you a good turn."

"Mind you throw your whole soul into this," she said.

"As if I wouldn't throw my whole soul into anything which gave me the remotest chance of a glimpse of light in that direction!"

"Come, that's right."

A servant announced a visitor.

"And you leave town to-morrow!" Mrs. Pollen said in a loud voice.

"Yes, I leave town to-morrow. Good evening."

CHAPTER XV.

"MY DAUGHTER—OH, MY DAUGHTER!"

THE stern political economist would hardly, we fear, have approved of all that Mrs. Pollen was doing. Unquestionably the restoration of Fitzurse House and grounds was in great measure undertaken with the object of giving employment to the people of Fitzurseham, those who worked and those who sold; and Mrs. Pollen never troubled herself about the laws of supply and demand. Nor could a very liberal-minded cosmopolitan philanthropist have smiled his cordial approval upon a beneficence narrowed almost exclusively to Fitzurseham. Mrs. Pollen seldom subscribed to any charity which did not belong to the region she patronized. She might be said to have been only a benefac-

tress to Fitzurseham. Her reason for this limitation of her bounty had something to be said for it; "I can't do everything. I am pretty well off in the way of money, but even my money wouldn't run to *that*. So as I happen to be cast down here on the soil of Fitzurseham, I don't see that I can do any better than help the people who are near me. I know something about them; I can see with my own eyes and judge for myself. And then, you know, I am a selfish, egotistic sort of woman; I like being a little queen of society, and I couldn't be that anywhere but in a poor, out-of-the-way sort of place like Fitzurseham. Gratitude? Oh, well, I don't care about gratitude; and I dare say the people here are just as grateful as people anywhere else."

So Mrs. Pollen went her own way; and was probably very happy, for the time at least, in her own way.

Something has been said about Mrs. Pollen's increasing correspondence. It was, indeed, increasing and multiplying in a manner which threatened to become over-

whelming. Far remote in condition and sentiment as Fitzurseham was from London society, yet even from out of Fitzurseham itself some rumours managed to make their way into London society about a lady of stately presence, boundless wealth, unparalleled liberality and charity, and somewhat eccentric ways, who was at once constructing a palace for herself in a swampy suburb and looking after the housing of all the poor for miles around. Paragraphs began to get into the society papers about her; the Lisles, whenever they went to town, were pestered by all their acquaintances for some news of her. Of course the reports immensely exaggerated all Mrs. Pollen's doings. She was indeed very active about the poor of Fitzurseham; if the readers of these pages do not receive full reports of all that she and the Lisles and Romont and Pilgrim had been doing or trying to do in that way, it is only because this narrative is a story merely, and not anything in the nature of the report of a Royal Commission. But if Mrs. Pollen had been Crœsus, Howard the philanthropist, and the

whole building firm of Cubitt rolled into one, she could not have accomplished the prodigies of charitable reconstruction which rumour assigned to her. Of course society sought her out, and of course she steadily declined to be found by society. She did not keep a London house. She still occupied the same rooms in a small private hotel in Dover Street, Piccadilly; she made use of a hired carriage; and her retinue of servants consisted of a man and a maid—for we do not as yet reckon among her domestics her Albanian retainer, Joseph. Great ladies called on her and left cards; Mrs. Pollen returned the civility by leaving her card at their doors; and there the matter ended. Enterprising and curious persons went so far out of their way as to visit Fitzurseham, and take a look at the house Mrs. Pollen was reconstructing there, and perhaps even had the good fortune to see her on the lawn. Meanwhile she was becoming the personal acquaintance of every man, woman, and child in Fitzurseham. Two classes of the population she left almost unheeded. Those who

were reasonably well off, and those who were hopelessly irreclaimable, her beneficence took little account of. The one class she thought did not want her, and for the other she could do nothing. "I can't do more than give a helping hand," she would say; "and a helping hand is for those who want help and can take it."

But as to the correspondence! It came in from all parts of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. It was already beginning to pour in with increasing volume from the United States. Beneficent institutions without number requested Mrs. Pollen's subscriptions and patronage, and proposed to her the taking of shares in unending speculations for the improvement of the condition of the poor. All this, however, was as nothing when compared with the letters from individual men and women. The appeals of associations and corporate bodies of any kind could be answered by subscription or by formal letter, circular fashion, declining and setting forth the reason, or setting no reason forth. But the men and women who wrote put

forward each a separate and individual case which must either be answered separately or left altogether unanswered. Many, of course, were obviously the appeals of begging-letter impostors and professional mendicants and swindlers. All such were dropped at once into a waste-paper basket. But there were great numbers of letters which were evidently, or at least to all appearance, genuine, and from the very heart of the writer; and these Mrs. Pollen would answer. Many of these were letters from women, simply asking for the advice of a woman. Ingenuous girls confided the whole story of their quarrels with their lovers, and besought Mrs. Pollen to tell them how they ought to go about to make the quarrels up. Wives implored her to tell them what they ought to do with regard to dissipated, or faithless, or drunken husbands. Mothers appealed to her for counsel about their daughters. Legion was the name of the number of girls whom she was implored to reclaim, and earnestly tried to reclaim, from lives of folly leading down to darkness and death. We need not say much

about the eccentric letters; the letters setting forth the value of some wonderful invention which she was besought to encourage; the letters admonishing her as to the state of her soul; the letters from men offering her their hand in marriage; the letters from downright maniacs; the letters which asked for nothing more than an autograph, or perhaps an autograph with an accompanying photograph; and also the letters from photographers inviting her to have her likeness taken in cabinet or panel form, to be expanded afterwards into life-size drawings in red chalk.

Many of these letters, it will be seen, had to do exclusively with the concerns of women—their poverty, their efforts to earn a living, their shifts and struggles, their loves and quarrels and sorrows. Mrs. Pollen found that she really could not manage all this correspondence herself, and she would not put it into the hands of any secretary but a woman. Perhaps a great deal of it did not call for answer at all; or might just as well have been answered by a man as by

a woman. Perhaps Mrs. Pollen only wanted to find an excuse for giving employment to Vinnie Lammas. But, at all events, she made up her mind that she must have a girl of intelligence and some education to assist her in her correspondence, and that Vinnie Lammas might, if she liked, be that girl. We know the deep designs Mrs. Pollen had long had in her mind concerning poor little Vinnie. Mrs. Pollen was a somewhat self-contradictory person in many ways. She was constantly saying scornful and cynical things about matrimony, and yet she had in her heart a weakness for match-making. To hear her talk sometimes one would have thought that she regarded married life as the most insufferable and absurd condition into which men and women could get; and yet she was now bent on bringing about a marriage between Camiola and Romont; and she had almost made up her mind that the best thing she could do for Pilgrim and Vinnie Lammas alike was to turn them into husband and wife as soon as possible. In truth, with

all her strength of mind and scorn of weakness, her courage, her unconventionality, and her humour, Mrs. Pollen was a very womanly woman.

She communicated her purpose concerning the employment of Vinnie Lammas to Mr. Pilgrim, and watched him keenly the while. He cordially approved, as indeed he would have approved of anything Mrs. Pollen suggested; and he was delighted on Vinnie's account. But the sort of emotion which Mrs. Pollen expected was not in him. He was not in love with Vinnie Lammas clearly —not as yet. Was there some one else? Very likely. Mrs. Pollen was not blind to the half-distracted manner which poor Pilgrim fell into for a while after his unfortunate outburst of love to Camiola. She knew that something had happened which was a load upon his mind—a distress and a shame to him.

"What do you think of my Albanian, Mr. Pilgrim?"

"Think of him, madame?"

"Yes, Mr. Pilgrim; 'twas my word."

"I don't know what to say, madame."

"Very well; don't say anything, then. I quite understand you. I dare say you have a theory about my Albanian——"

Pilgrim smiled.

"Yes; no doubt. You would come to know, of course, in time. Only let it be a theory for the present; and take it for granted that there is an honest and reasonable purpose in everything my Albanian and I may do."

"As if I could possibly doubt that, madame!" If Mrs. Pollen had told him that she had a particular desire that he should fling himself into the Thames, Christian Pilgrim would have assumed without any question that she had an honest and reasonable purpose in telling him so.

"My Albanian and I are much concerned just now about the happiness of two young people, Mr. Pilgrim."

This was a sentence spoken with a double purpose.

"I—I thought as much, madame."

He had great difficulty in saying these

few words. He gasped and stammered and kept his eyes away from hers; looked down, looked round; looked anywhere but in the direction of her eyes. She remained purposely silent, and kept her look fixed on him, and she saw his uneasiness. She knew all now. "Poor, absurd fellow!" she said to herself. "Poor, heavy old moth—would nothing serve it but to singe its wings at the flame of that brilliant candle?" A certain amount of contempt was mingled in her pity for him.

"Oh! another thing I wanted to talk to you about, Mr. Pilgrim. You once lived in Sheffield, did you not?"

"Yes, madame." This was a painful subject; it brought back the memory of his unhappy married life.

"Now let me ask you another question or two. Don't think I mean to put you to any needless pain; but you will soon see what my reason is, and you will not find fault with it."

Pilgrim bent his head and remained silent.

"I want to ask you two questions. Was

your wife's maiden name Eccles, and had she an elder sister?"

"Her name was Eccles, madame, and she had an elder sister, whom I never saw."

"Do you know whether that elder sister ever had a daughter?"

"I never, madame, asked or was told anything about her—there was nothing very pleasant to be learned, I fear."

"Well, I believe that she had a daughter; and that that daughter is the girl about whom poor old Jethro Merridew went half-mad. I believe she is Jethro Merridew's daughter, and that she is still alive somewhere; and I want you to help me in finding her, if we can. I don't ask you to do this because she is your niece—and I fully believe she is, and I will tell you presently why I believe it—but because there is a chance of your be ng able to do some good, and because I think by doing so you will brighten and make bearable some of the sadder memories of your own life, and dismiss into the darkness some of those shadows and phantoms that haunt you now; some of them bright phan-

toms perhaps, as well as dark and grey, but phantoms all the same, and misleading and distracting."

Pilgrim shook his head in melancholy assent.

"Come, I am your friend and you know it. I will tell you how I found out all this, and how I found out something that concerns myself, too. I begin to be pretty sure that I have a relative living; relative by marriage, that is to say, as well as you, about whom I knew nothing a few months ago. I hope he is likely to do me some credit, but I am not by any means quite certain on that point."

Then Mrs. Pollen explained fully to Pilgrim what she had found out, or believed herself to have found out, and how she had got at it. "I have given him something to think over," she said in her own mind—"something *else*."

Always dealing with Merridew and talking with him as if he were a thoroughly sane and sensible man, Mrs. Pollen had won him into a confidence and a quietude which allowed him the full use of such sanity as he

possessed. She soon became convinced that he was, indeed, sound and shrewd enough on every point but the strange disappearance of his daughter and her certain return, glorified into a fine lady. It was quite clear to Mrs. Pollen that poor Jethro once had a daughter, and that on some one eventful occasion she had left him, and had afterwards written to him and told him that she would return one day a lady. In all this there was nothing surprising. The girl might well have been enticed away by some admirer, who promised that he would marry her and bring her back in honour and splendour to her father's house. It was unfortunately only too probable that such a promise would not have been kept; and so the girl would not come back to her home. Little by little Mrs. Pollen got at the whole reality of Merridew's story. He had been married; his wife was a Sheffield woman, her maiden name was Eccles; she had left him—had run away from him, leaving their one little daughter behind. For this one little daughter Merridew lived, worked, pinched, starved. He

would never bring her into Fitzurseham whither he had migrated or drifted after his wife left him. He had kept the girl at a good school, where she was taught French and music and other such lady-like accomplishments. The whole soul of the poor man was set on making a lady of his child. While she was still at the school she ran away; he did not know whether alone or in companionship; only that she had gone.

Merridew's mental condition resembled the physical condition of one who is suddenly struck blind or deaf by some shock. Up to a certain day, hour, and minute he is in full possession of all his senses and faculties; from that instant forth he is robbed of some of them for ever. This was mentally Merridew's case. Up to the time when his daughter left him all was clear; with her disappearance his confusion began. Now that he had become confidential with Mrs. Pollen he could tell her the whole story of his life, with its every incident, up to the moment when he got the letter from his daughter telling him of her flight; from that moment he could tell

nothing clearly—nothing, that is to say, that had to do with his daughter's story. On every other subject he was shrewd and sharp; on that subject all was confusion. He could not tell of any steps he had taken to find the girl; he could not remember whether he had taken any steps. He could not give any reason for his belief that she would certainly come back; he only grew angry and looked puzzled if any question of the kind were pressed upon him. His conviction was, to Mrs. Pollen's thinking, simply a part of his mental disorder, to be traced back to the shock of his daughter's disappearance. He loved to tell his story over and over again, enriched with many quotations from the poets, to his benefactress, "the lady of the land," as he now called Mrs. Pollen. She listened again and again, always hoping for some hint or word which might supply a missing link in the narrative, and put her in the way of making some quest for the lost daughter.

The girl had written him a letter, in which she avowed, apparently with all the wild sincerity of passionate affection and grief, that

she would come back to him a lady. There, it seemed to Mrs. Pollen, was the point at which his mind became shaken. He took his daughter's promise as something like the word of a prophet. Life had nothing in which he believed with so profound a conviction as the certainty of her glorified return. He was educating himself for this; he was giving himself airs in advance on the strength of the position he was to be called to occupy; he became the butt of the neighbours for his crazy vanity. Mrs. Pollen was easily able to verify much of the story. An application to the school settled part of it. Poor Merridew brought her his daughter's letter, and gave it to her to read. None but he had ever read it before. But Mrs. Pollen could not succeed in finding any further trace of the girl. Several years had passed, and Merridew's daughter, if she were living, would not be particularly young any longer. It may have been, perhaps, only the most ordinary version of a commonplace old story. A giddy girl, the daughter of a very giddy mother, disappeared below the surface of society, and did

not reappear. There would be nothing very amazing in that. Mrs. Pollen, however, did not put that view of the matter to Merridew. On the contrary, she felt convinced that the best tie he had on life, the only thing that made life endurable to him, was this happy delusion about the sure return of his daughter. Mrs. Pollen tried her best to believe it herself.

CHAPTER XVI.

"ALL TO OURSELVES."

"AND we shall have a happy day, all to ourselves—mind, all to ourselves."

These were the words in which Camiola accepted, with sparkling eyes, the invitation of Mrs. Pollen to come over to Fitzurse House and spend a whole day there looking at the progress of the work, giving ideas about the decorations of the rooms, and the arrangement of the grounds, and so forth. Camiola made this her condition, that they were to have a happy day to themselves. It is not for this that a young lady with a devoted lover usually makes a bargain. She does not as a rule suggest a stipulation which implies that the lover is not to be allowed to come near her for a whole day. But Mrs.

Pollen quite understood the girl, and was anxious that she should have her wish. It would be a relief to Camiola to have a day altogether free from the occupations, the emotions, and the attentions of the Rectory now. There were times when Camiola dreaded even the kindly eyes of Lady Letitia. They looked doubtingly, suspiciously, at her sometimes—those kindly eyes. Lady Letitia evidently had an uneasy doubt, even still, about Camiola's willingness to marry Georgie. She dreaded lest the girl should be making a mere sacrifice to friendship, which she would one day regret. This troubled Lady Letitia all the more because she could not at the bottom of her heart feel quite satisfied as to her own conduct. Camiola saw all this, and was glad to be away, for a few free hours even, alone with Mrs. Pollen.

Lady Letitia, for her part, was glad that Camiola was to be out of the way for some hours. She had determined to have a full explanation with Janette concerning Walter Fitzurse, and she thought she could manage better with Janette if they, too, were alone,

for it was as likely as not that Camiola might side with Janette out of some romantic sympathy with young love and all that sort of thing; and Janette would perhaps feel strengthened up to the point of actual defiance. Poor Lady Letitia did not by any means like the prospect of what she feared would be a conflict. Janette was, in her way, as headstrong as Georgie, and strength of will is a very different thing indeed from strength of intellect.

Meanwhile Camiola found a welcome reception at Fitzurse House. She had made use of her key, and let herself into the music-room without ring of bell or summons of servant. She did not see Mr. Pilgrim anywhere, and was delighted. She did not know that Mrs. Pollen had purposely found an occasion for sending him out of the way.

"Come, let me look at you," Mrs. Pollen said. "Come over here, in the full sunlight; I want to see exactly what you are looking like now. Yes, I thought so. You are getting paler and paler every day. What is the matter with you, child?"

"Nothing, Mrs. Pollen; nothing, indeed."

"That 'nothing' appears to be a very active influence for harm with some people, I find."

"It doesn't do me any harm; I am perfectly well. Wait until luncheon, and you will see."

"Is Georgie going back to Egypt?"

"Oh yes, certainly."

"Before you are married?"

"Yes. I think he ought to go. I think he ought to see the campaign out. I am not fond of soldiering, Mrs. Pollen. I believe I am unlike most girls in that. I don't like any wars but wars of defence. I don't like wars of policy, as they are called, I believe, and I don't think if I were a man I could be got to bear a hand in anything of the kind. Still, I know that these are not Georgie's ideas, nor the ideas of his father and mother. And as he is gone in for soldiering, I don't think he ought to draw out until this campaign is over. I am afraid I couldn't much admire a man who did that."

"Did he wish to do it?"

"Oh no; not at all. He has plenty of spirit and courage, in that way. He is very anxious to get well and get back; but he wanted me to marry him first. He wanted to have a Mrs. George Lisle as the girl he left behind him."

"And the girl wouldn't?"

"No, I wouldn't. When he comes back it will be time enough."

Some people, if they had heard Camiola talking in this cool, firm way might have supposed that she wanted heart, or wanted delicacy of feeling. Mrs. Pollen, of course, did not suppose anything of the kind. She could see quite clearly the effort it cost Camiola to speak of the matter at all; she could understand the modest and womanly resolve that if Camiola had to confide anything about her own position and her own feelings to another woman she must leave no doubt as to that position and those feelings. Mrs. Pollen admired the girl greatly, even when she was angry with her. She could not but admire the sacrifice Camiola was making, even though she was angry with her

for making such a sacrifice. She suddenly turned to another subject. Speaking as if quite casually, but with a very distinct purpose in her mind, she said—

"*He* has a theory against war, too."

She fixed her eyes steadfastly on Camiola's face. Camiola coloured slightly and looked down. Would she look up with real or assumed ignorance and ask, "Who has a theory?" No; she only said in a very low voice—

"Yes; I know."

This was enough for Mrs. Pollen. The "he" was Albert Romont, of course. He was then just as much in Camiola's mind as ever. Albert Romont was still "he" to her. He was still her ideal hero; it was with a certain tenderness and pride that she admitted her knowledge of his views and the fact that they were like her own.

"That is the reason he never went into the army," Mrs. Pollen said; "although he loves adventure, and he has risked his life ever so much more than the ordinary soldier does. He has been on battle-fields, he told

me; he has worn the Geneva Cross and looked after the wounded. But he says he couldn't bear a hand in any war but a defensive war. I told him I thought his opinions on that subject were rubbish, and that man's first business in life was to fight with his brother man and kill him. He only laughed and said I liked talking paradoxes. But really, Camiola, I am inclined to think that as things go most of our brother men would be much better dead than alive, and that it is quite an act of philanthropy to kill them. I don't think I succeeded in convincing or converting him."

"No, you couldn't convert him," Camiola said.

"He only replied that there was always sure to be some woman sorry for every fellow who was killed. How odd that your ideas and his should be so much alike!"

"I had always those ideas," Camiola said quietly, "as long as I can remember. Perhaps they came of my not having been born in good society. Doesn't Kinglake say that no English lady would stand having her

boys taught the doctrines of the Peace Society?"

"I don't know, dear; but *his* mother is an English lady; and he seems to have got hold of some of the doctrines of the Peace Society from some one. Strange that you should come to be a soldier's wife with such views, Camiola."

"Oh, well, I can hardly pretend to call them views; they are sentiments rather, or feelings. And after all I don't intend to be a soldier's wife, Mrs. Pollen."

"You mean to disarm our youthful and slender Mars?"

"I hope Georgie will give up soldiering after this campaign, and settle down to a quiet life."

"Get into Parliament, and that sort of thing?"

"I don't know about that; but I hope he will do something, and not be a mere idler; I couldn't have any respect for a man who was a mere idler."

Later on Mrs. Pollen suddenly said—

"We are going to have a row on the river,

Camiola; you and I. My Albanian, Joseph, will row us. You have not seen my Albanian yet?"

"No; I am very anxious to see him; I never saw an Albanian; I am not quite sure that I know exactly what an Albanian is—a sort of Greek, is he not?"

"Well, yes; a sort of Greek. We are to drive a few miles. The river here is not streamlike enough for my taste; too many buildings and barges. Joseph is to meet us with the boat a few miles farther up."

"That will be so delightful."

They had a pleasant drive through leafy roads, the summer still hardly waning. At length the carriage turned down a quiet green lane, a lane that had English landscape in every turf and blade and flower, and they came on the river and saw a small boat rocking on the sunny water, and Joseph with a pair of sculls in hand awaiting them on the bank. Joseph wore a full beard and moustache of jet black, and had heavy black eyebrows and a skin nearly as sallow-brown as that of a North African. He was dressed

much like an English sailor. Mrs. Pollen gave him a few directions in Italian—a sort of Levantine Italian—in acceptance of which he merely bowed. He helped the ladies into the little boat with the grave dignity of a Red Indian. When they were seated in the stern he shoved off into mid-stream.

"I cannot tell how or why it is," Camiola said in a low tone, "but I feel strangely when I look at your Albanian. There is something about him which affects me in a way I can't explain. He seems as if he were part of some past chapter of my life. I wonder can I have lived in his country and have been an Albanian during some pre-existence, and seen him and known him? What is the matter with me, dear Mrs. Pollen? I wish I could see Albania."

"You must travel. You have not travelled much yet?"

"No, hardly anywhere. We are to travel, I believe."

"We?"

"Georgie and I, after we are married. I dare say I shall enjoy it very much."

Camiola had taken off her glove and was trailing her hand in the water and watching the ripples. Her tone and manner did not carry with them much promise of enjoyment.

"I have travelled a great deal," Mrs. Pollen said. "I don't know that it has done me any particular good or given me much instruction."

"But your memory must be such a treasure-house of beautiful pictures and associations. You interest me much, Mrs. Pollen."

"Do I, dear? I am glad if I can be interesting to any one, but especially to you. I don't interest myself, not one little bit; but then, you see, I know all my own story."

"I should like to know it," Camiola said, with a simple openness. "I know you have a story."

"Nothing new, my dear; only the poor common story of a wasted life—though, by the way, it might have a moral and a lesson for you, if one human being ever took a lesson from the fate and the follies and the sufferings of another. But human beings don't take any such lessons, and I have long

given up the notion of guiding or warning any one. At least I have got out of the way of hoping anything from it; I am afraid I do try to warn you sometimes."

"I should like to hear the lesson of your life for me—it might do me good; I don't think I am *very* perverse."

"My life was wasted just because I was weak and unwise enough to marry a man I didn't love; that's the whole story. Take care, Camiola, that you do not commit the same act of folly—worse than folly. That's all."

Camiola said nothing. To argue the question would be useless, she thought.

"How delicious this air is," she said, "and this river, and those bewitching trees! Suppose we now go close in under those trees."

Mrs. Pollen said some words to her Albanian, and he brought them with a few rapid strokes of his sculls close to the bank, and under the bending branches of some trees that hung over the stream. They were now in a lonely little creek, out of sight and sound of other boats.

"Oh, this day and this place make me feel

happy again, and so young, ever so young!" Camiola exclaimed, in a little burst of gladsome enthusiasm.

"Fancy, at your age, talking of feeling happy again and young!" Mrs. Pollen said. "You not happy; not always happy! You who have youth, and beauty, and fortune, and a lover who adores you and——"

"Oh, I wish he didn't adore me," Camiola said, half in laughter, half in tears; "it is so dreadful to be adored. I don't want to be adored; I was never made for adoration; I am only a commonplace girl; I hate to see a man grovelling at my feet. There, I wish I hadn't said all that; it was wrong of me; it was cruel to—to him, of course, if I had really meant it, but I didn't. It was your words that drew it out of me, Mrs. Pollen; and indeed I believe you have set your heart on making me reveal my whole soul and all its secrets to you. I was going to say a rude thing, such a dreadful thing, and yet I was not thinking of being rude—the very contrary. I was thinking only of an expression of confidence in you, and affection."

"I know what you were going to say very well, and I am delighted with it, and I echo it; and, indeed, I think I said much the same thing before."

"Then you do know?" Camiola asked, with a faint colour on her cheeks; "and you are not offended?"

"Of course I know, and I am very much delighted. You were going to say that you wished I were your mother."

"Yes; but it was absurd, for you are ever so much too young."

"So far as years go, I might have been your mother long ago; and I wish I were. But I can tell you, child, that if I were I would stand no nonsense on that marriage question. You would have to go to bed without supper if I heard any more of that."

"I am very fond of Lady Letitia, too," Camiola said with simplicity, as if she felt bound to make some acknowledgment to the absent Lady Letitia.

"Yes, of course you are. But just at present it is a sort of relief to you to be away from her now and then. In your secret

heart you think she might have stood by you a little more; and you resent it."

"Oh no, Mrs. Pollen; I do not, indeed."

"Yes, you do," Mrs. Pollen said decisively. "You don't admit it to yourself, or you will not admit it, but the feeling is there all the same; I can read that much of your heart."

Camiola tried to disclaim any such feeling, but the more she tried the harder it became. The more she admitted question of the matter at all the more it grew upon her that in her secret heart there was a feeling of disappointment and pain with regard to Lady Letitia. Mrs. Pollen had read her heart indeed.

"Are you a witch?" she asked, with a half-melancholy smile; "are there no secrets from you?"

"None that you could keep, my dear. Yours is a very transparent soul, and I have an interest in studying it." Mrs. Pollen made a sign and they pushed out into the stream again.

"Your Albanian rows very much like an Englishman," Camiola said; "I did not sup-

pose that Greeks of any kind rowed like that."

"My good English girl, pray do not fancy that there are no sailors in the world but those of Wapping Old Stairs and Portsmouth Hard. The Greeks of the islands are born seamen. This man is not a Greek, however, and he has been a great deal with Englishmen."

"How silent and statue-like he is! He reminds me of the man of metal in the 'Arabian Nights' who rowed one of the Calendars, the sons of kings, and suddenly sank when the name of God was reverently spoken. Do you think your mysterious man would sink if I were to breathe that name?"

"No, Camiola; he is a Christian like ourselves; and he is not made of metal; though I don't say that he may not be enchanted."

"Indeed? How delightful! But how?"

"Oh, I don't know," Mrs. Pollen answered carelessly. "He looked at you, I fancied, as if he were enchanted; but I don't suppose he could well help doing that, seeing that he has eyes."

"I think he is handsome," Camiola said, not heeding Mrs. Pollen's words; "and yet I don't know. He perplexes me with some distracting dim idea of having seen him before. Do you know, Mrs. Pollen, I think I am in a sort of silly humour to-day? I feel somehow like a released school-girl—I don't know why."

"Don't you? I do."

"Oh no. Why, then?"

"Because you are a released school-girl—or released girl at all events."

Another touch at the wounded place. Camiola threw a beseeching look at Mrs. Pollen.

"How can I go on teasing you in this way, you were going to ask? Only for your good, my dear. I want to make you familiar with your real self and your real feelings."

"My dear kind friend, pray, pray don't misunderstand me. You may see too much or see in dreadfully exaggerated proportions. I know what I am doing quite well; I have misgivings every now and then; but I think

I should have them in any case. I fancy most girls must have some little touches of misgiving at such a time under the very happiest conditions, and I don't think I am naturally a marrying girl. I think I could be very happy living my own free life with my friends. But I don't think I feel any misgivings on account of *him*—of Georgie. I think I can make him happy, and I don't see why I should not be quite happy too in the end. Now that is really how I feel, and I want you not to misunderstand me; with all your mysterious insight and reading of hearts I think you do misunderstand me sometimes."

"Very good," said Mrs. Pollen; "we shall see. Meanwhile I take account of your protest, Camiola; I make a note of it, as I believe they say in the courts of law."

They had a delightful time of it on the river. Camiola had not been so happy for many a day. It seemed to her a season of relief and of rescue. She was really tired almost out of all patience of being adored. She was weary of hearing her own praises

eternally chanted in a somewhat minor key; of listening to words of passionate ecstasy in unending iteration. "I love you, I love you, I adore you," such was the weary burden of the song that was always sounding in her ears. She could not even resent it; she had to endure it. She could only encourage herself with the sad sick hope that it would not last for ever. To this it had already come! Camiola looked out in hope and with positive yearning to a time in their impending married life when poor dear Georgie would not be quite so much in love with her; when his passion should have cooled and quieted down; when he would regard her with a less lover-like and ecstatic admiration; when he would take her for granted, and not weary himself and her any more with protestations of his devotion, his gratitude, and his happiness. "Then we can talk to each other like rational human creatures," she thought to herself; "we shall be like an ordinary man and woman; I shall hear no more about my own perfections—those sickening perfections! and I shall like him

ever so much, and be very happy with him. Perhaps he will come not to care for me at all in the end; but even that will be much better."

This was the mood, these were the hopes, in which our poor rich girl was contemplating her approaching marriage. No wonder that she found it a relief to spend some hours alone with Mrs. Pollen. Mrs. Pollen was, she believed, the only living creature who understood her and sympathized with her. The only disadvantage she found was that Mrs. Pollen understood her rather too well, and was in the habit of suddenly holding up a lamp by means of which Camiola was able for the first time to read clearly the innermost secret of her own heart. Yet even that, while it startled her, also gave her a sense of sympathy and made her feel that she was not alone. She clung to Mrs. Pollen with a closeness and tenderness that touched the elder woman beyond expression.

After a while they landed again, and got into the carriage to go home. The Albanian mounted the box with the coachman. Mrs.

Pollen did not say much as they were driving home, but whatever she did say harped on the one string. It had always something to do with Camiola's engagement to Georgie Lisle. Camiola's nerves had by this time become a little unstrung, which was exactly what Mrs. Pollen wished them to be. Isabel Pollen had to perform an experiment in heart-surgery which she firmly believed was needed for the preservation and the welfare of her all-unconscious young patient, and the patient had to be brought to a certain condition of nervousness before the remedy could effectively be tried.

As they were entering the house Mrs. Pollen said a few words to Joseph in the sort of Italian which he understood, telling him that she would ring for him presently, and would have a letter for him to take. The two women entered the music-room. Just then it was flooded by the amber fire of the descending sun.

Mrs. Pollen had taken her seat at the organ, and was playing a few soft sonorous chords. Camiola stood near.

"How beautiful this room is!" Camiola said. "You have made everything beautiful here. How sorry I am the day is so nearly over! I have enjoyed it so much."

"Come again to-morrow."

"Oh, I couldn't do that," Camiola said hastily.

"Your lover couldn't do without you, I suppose?"

"I suppose not. I don't know." She took up a book and began to turn over its leaves.

"Tell me, Camiola, has he ever kissed you?"

"Never; oh, indeed, never."

"Nor even tried to?"

"No."

Camiola did not add that she had never since their engagement been one moment alone with her lover.

"I give you my word, Camiola, I wouldn't have such a lover as that for all the world."

"But, dear Mrs. Pollen, you don't understand; you don't do him justice"—and

Camiola could not help laughing at her own defence of her lover. "He knows I would not like it; he falls in with my humour; he is a very chivalrous boy; he is *indeed*. I am afraid he knows only too well that I don't really love him—in that sort of way; and he is willing to take me as I am, but he would not do anything that I didn't like."

"Except marry you," Mrs. Pollen said scornfully.

"Yes, but I am willing to marry him; quite willing. It was I who made the advance; at last, I mean. He had dropped the thing altogether, he was not saying anything more about it; but I told Lady Letitia that I would marry him if he liked."

"Nice unselfish boy," Mrs. Pollen murmured.

"But indeed he is unselfish; he was prepared to let me do as I pleased; he didn't mean to press me any more, and I am very much attached to him, and I am sure I shall come to love him in the end. I am growing quite tender to him already. And then they

are all so fond of me. Lady Letitia seems so happy. Mrs. Pollen, you are the last woman in the world who could pretend not to understand what a happy thing it is to make other people happy—you who live for nothing else; you who have no pleasure at all of your own that I can see, and who only enjoy doing something for everybody and anybody else. Fancy your not understanding why I should like to make Lady Letitia and Georgie and all of them happy."

Mrs. Pollen got up and rang the bell twice. That was her summons to her Albanian. She went on talking.

"Camiola, it always seems to me that you don't take this matter seriously enough. What do I sacrifice by indulging my whims—for they are only whims and nothing more? A little money—which I don't want, and shouldn't know what to do with in any other way. Now, what are you going to sacrifice? Your life—your whole life—your love; your inner sense of what is right. Remember that you have a heart, and a warm heart. Have you thought of what the condition of

that heart would be if anything were to happen?"

Joseph had entered the room, and was standing mute as an image awaiting Mrs. Pollen's commands. Mrs. Pollen had a letter in her hand which she was about to give him.

"Have you thought of what your feelings would be if before your marriage, or after it, you were to meet—yes, I will put it plainly—if you were to meet Mr. Romont again?"

Camiola was so startled by this sudden question that the book she was holding dropped from her hands to the ground. Her face crimsoned; her hands trembled; she tried to speak, and could not find utterance. The terror long present in a vague and shadowy way and in some remote corner of her mind was made by Mrs. Pollen's words to come out into the light and assume the shape of a menacing apparition. Poor Camiola's nerves, as we have seen, were all unstrung. She had been listening with a strange feeling of morbid pleasure and morbid

pain to all that Mrs. Pollen had been saying about her engagement, and everything that had been said was made to lead up to this final stroke now given so suddenly and so keenly that it seemed to set all her heart's blood flowing at once. There was a moment's struggle, and then Camiola broke down utterly. Pride, shame, and all gave way. She covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

The Albanian made a sudden movement as if he were about to go to her; then he turned and abruptly left the room.

Mrs. Pollen put her arms tenderly round Camiola.

"There, there, my dear; perhaps I ought not to have touched you quite so sharply. But you understand yourself and everything else better now, don't you? You will soon see your way."

Camiola began to recover herself.

"Oh, Mrs. Pollen," she sobbed out, "you have played upon my heart as on the keys of your organ."

"I have brought out sweet, true, and

tender notes from it, my dear," Mrs. Pollen answered; "the music of your future, believe me."

Mrs. Pollen was indeed well content with the result of her experiment in playing on the keys of Camiola's heart.

CHAPTER XVII.

"BUT THERE REMAINS A SCRUPLE."

CAMIOLA had gone home. Mrs. Pollen returned to her music-room, and, according to her custom when alone there, was playing on her organ. She was delighted at the result of her experiment thus far. She thought she had brought Camiola to a point from which the girl could not draw back. How the engagement with Georgie Lisle was to be got rid of Mrs. Pollen did not know and did not much care; but she was determined that it must be got rid of one way or another. Her interest was all in Camiola and Romont; she had the poorest opinion of Georgie, and was not in the slightest degree concerned about his feelings. With full recognition of Mrs. Pollen's many generous and some noble

qualities, we cannot profess to believe that she was rigidly scrupulous as to means when once she had convinced herself that her ends were all right.

The music-room was but faintly lighted as yet. The twilight had not wholly faded from the skies, which could be seen through the still uncurtained windows. Mrs. Pollen, absorbed in her music, did not hear the door open or see her Albanian come in. She started when she heard his voice in the dim light. The voice spoke in remarkably good English this time, although with much emotion.

"Is she gone?"

The voice, we need hardly tell any reader, was the voice of Albert Romont, although the complexion was still the complexion of Albanian Joseph.

"Well?" Mrs. Pollen asked exultingly. She had risen from her seat at the organ, and was coming towards him with both hands held out. "Are you satisfied now? Was I right? Do you begin to see your way at last?"

"Look here," Romont said passionately, "I can't have anything more to do with this. It seems a dreadful thing—we two to find out all about this girl's feelings—it's like acting the part of a spy. I won't play at this game any more."

"Isn't that being a little too scrupulous? Have you not a right to know how the girl feels to you? Have you not a right to save her from a fate worse a thousand times than death to a girl with such a heart and brains and soul? Death? Why, what is death to any woman with spirit enough to make her worthy to live?"

"Still I can't do it any more; I feel as if I were doing something which would wound her to the heart if she came to know."

"What about the wound to her heart when she is married to that young man and finds she has to live a long life with him, tied to him, chained to him, and knows she never, never, can love him? What about her heart then? Stuff and nonsense! Bertie Romont, you talk like a child. If I were you I would carry her off by force rather than let her

sacrifice herself to him. Yes, I would; and more than that, I would kill her—I would indeed—kill her with my own hand rather than let her give herself up to him; and I should feel certain that I had done a good and a righteous deed. Oh, you men, what spiritless creatures you are!"

"But I so love her," he pleaded, "I so adore her. I hate the thought of hurting her feelings. Every moment I see her or listen to her I only love and adore her all the more. You don't understand, and you couldn't understand how I feel. There is a sort of terror in my love; I am so afraid of offending her. You see, a woman can't feel to a woman as a man does. You can't have any of the sort of goddess notion about any woman, but men can—I can. I feel to her sometimes as if she were a sort of divinity."

"All right," said Mrs. Pollen coolly, "I am very glad. I don't think any the worse of a young man because he is a little crazy about a girl. The fault I find with *you* is that you are not half crazy enough. But anyhow, my very sensitive and scrupulous

young man, don't your scruples come rather late? There is nothing more to find out, is there? You cannot pretend to have any doubt on your mind as to the state of her feelings now?"

"Oh no, I can't have any doubt now. If I had only known, or thought, or guessed before! But what is the use now?"

"There was no watching or spying needful on my part," Mrs. Pollen said; "I knew it all before. I suspected it from the beginning. I knew it just as soon as she did; the very same moment that told it to her told it to me. Later on she told it to me herself."

"Told it to you herself?"

"Yes; I gave her to understand that I had found out her secret, and then she told me that I was right. She has been in love with you this long time, but not so long as you have been in love with her."

Romont looked at her with quick surprise. "How do you know that?" he asked.

"How do I know anything? Because I use my eyes and my senses. You were in love with her the very first day you saw her.

The moment I saw how your eyes rested on her, even when you did not yet know who she was, I felt sure that you had found your fate, in the matter of love-making at least; so far as that sort of work makes up a man's fate. I tried you with one or two questions as we were driving away—as we passed Georgie Lisle on the bridge, and even before we saw him; and your answers made me quite certain that I was right. I dare say you didn't know it yourself then; but I did. I didn't find her out until the night we saw her stooping over him and kissing him."

"But surely that ought to have made you think she was in love with *him*. It made me think so; it made me sure of it. I made up my mind to leave England at the first possible moment—after that."

"Men are so dull in these affairs. As if a girl kissing a young fellow whom she had known like a brother—a young fellow wounded, who had just fallen in a faint under her very eyes—as if her kissing him was any proof of her being in love with him!"

"Well, but anyhow it surely wasn't any proof of her being in love with me?"

Mrs. Pollen smiled. "Directly, no; indirectly, yes, yes! The moment she saw you your name came out in a cry from her lips. I saw the way she looked at you and to you and then away from you; I saw that for the moment she was only thinking that you must have seen her kiss him, and then I knew; I told her so that very night."

"Then, in the name of Heaven, my dear kind and mysteriously gifted Mrs. Pollen, why on earth did you not tell me?"

"My dear kind and by no means mysteriously gifted, but on the contrary remarkably dull and stupid Mr. Romont, why should I have told you anything at all about it?"

"Since you professed to be my friend and her friend," he said gravely; "since you are so anxious now to save her and me from a life of wretched and cruel mistake——"

"I don't know that I had professed any great friendship for either of you at that time; although I did like you both; but in any case how was I to suppose that a young

man who appeared to have plenty of spirit, and had done all sorts of plucky things for people he never spoke to, would venture nothing to find out whether the girl he was in love with was in love with him? How was I to suppose that you would quietly let the matter drop? How was I to suppose that she would never make the slightest use of her eyes to encourage you? If I were she I would have contrived with one little quiet half-glance that her mother, if she were living, might have seen and failed to understand—I would have contrived to make you understand that you were welcome to say something to me. No, though; I am not so sure about that. I doubt after what has happened, whether I could have made *you* understand; but I would have tried."

"Oh, but she wouldn't; she couldn't do anything like that," he said hastily.

"Thank you very much; such a nice graceful compliment to me! She couldn't do such a dreadful thing; no, of course not; but I could."

"I didn't mean that."

"Well, no matter; I forgive you. I quite admit that there are things I would do and your divinity would not do. But to come back to the point. How was I to suppose that you would have acted so absurdly as you did, both of you? Of course, I wasn't going to betray the girl's secret to you, or to any man alive."

"But you have done it all the same."

"Well, I put you in the way of finding it out, certainly. But I wasn't going to say to you—Dear, good, generous young man, take pity on this young woman who has fallen in love with you, and if you are really in love with her, prythee be kind enough to tell her so."

"Well, we have muddled it among us."

"Excuse me; *we* have not muddled anything; at least, I have not muddled it. You and she may have done a good deal of muddling between you; but I have not. I have done my best to counteract the effects of your muddling, and will still do it."

"What would you have me do now?"

"Go to her, go to her at once, this minute;

and tell her all. Tell her that you are in love with her, and that you know she is in love with you."

"And she will say I am too late; she will say she is pledged, and promised, and engaged, and all the rest of it, to this confounded Lisle."

"Tell her she must break it off. Tell her she shall not marry him. Don't hesitate, or allow her to think for a moment that you would hesitate. Prevent her from making herself unhappy just as you would prevent her from throwing herself out of the window. I suppose if you saw her going to throw herself out of the window you would not scruple about putting your arms round her waist to hold her back? Take my word for it, you would do a much kinder thing to a girl like Camiola if you were to let her throw herself out of the window than if you were to allow her to marry Georgie Lisle."

"We don't live in the days of young Lochinvar, Mrs. Pollen," he said; "I wish to Heaven we did. I wish I might take her up on my saddle and gallop off with her.

But I am afraid Camiola," he felt his cheek grow hot as he spoke out her name in this way, "is not the sort of girl to stand being carried off in that kind of way. And then, don't you know, I am very much inclined to believe that she will think I have played her a shabby trick by getting her secret out of her in this way—this absurd disguise. I didn't think of it before in that light, but now it does seem to me an awfully mean thing to have done."

"There!" said Mrs. Pollen. "I might have expected this. I put you in the way of knowing for certain that the girl you love loves you; and my thanks is to be told that I have done a mean trick, which a woman of better bringing up would despise. I wonder any woman ever goes into any sort of enterprise with a man. Why, you pitiful creatures don't seem to understand even the principle of honour among thieves! Since Eve was fool enough to try to please her shabby husband, things were always just like that. Very good, Mr. Romont; I have my reward. Settle the matter for yourself."

"No, no; don't be angry with me," he pleaded. "I didn't mean that or anything like that—but what was only kind and friendly of you to suggest for both our sakes, hers and mine, may not have been quite right for me to do. You see, she's not a woman of the world."

"Well, well," Mrs. Pollen said impatiently, cutting him off in his explanation, "never mind about all that. I don't care whether you include me in your vote of censure or leave me out of it. I am quite willing to admit that both you and she are far too lofty in your natures and too refined in your scruples for this rough world altogether; and I don't feel myself by any means at home in such very superior company. Perhaps after all she had better marry Georgie Lisle. The boy is a very nice boy, in his way; and I dare say she'll get to be awfully fond of him, in time. Anyhow *we* can't do anything more, can we? Now to come to a practical matter, what is to become of my Albanian Joseph? Does he disappear from this moment, and how am I to account for his coming like a

shadow and so departing? Must we say he was a mere ghost; or shall I give out that I have packed him off to Albania again?"

"As if it mattered," Romont said; "as if you or I cared about that. Come, Mrs. Pollen, don't be angry with me; I can't stand it; I must have you for my friend and on my side. You see how outspoken I am with you; I don't keep any of my thoughts from you."

"All right," Mrs. Pollen said. "I am not easily offended and I am very easily appeased. Now about your scruples. Must you tell your divinity the part you have played?"

"Oh yes," he answered quietly, but very firmly. "I could not keep that from her. If I tell her what I know I must tell her how I came to know it. Why, the whole strength of my position is that I know it from her lips, almost; yes, it was really from her own lips. But in any case I would tell her."

"Must you tell her now?"

"Now? Why, of course. At what other time could I tell her, if not now?"

"After," Mrs. Pollen said coolly.

"After what?'"

"Oh, you most stupid young man; after you are married, to be sure. It would be all right then."

Romont positively coloured like a girl.

"Oh no, that would never do; that would be a marrying under false pretences. Besides, I think it is very, very doubtful whether she will ever marry me at all. She isn't like other girls."

"No girl ever is," said Mrs. Pollen.

"Ever is what?"

"Ever is like other girls. At least, I never yet heard a man admit that the girl he was mashed upon was one bit like other girls; and I never knew a girl who admitted or believed that she was like other girls. Well, you must only throw yourself upon her mercy. *I* wouldn't if I were you; but that's another matter."

"What would you do?"

"Tell her that I loved her, and that I knew she loved me; and that we were to be married, and not listen to a single word to the contrary. Show her that you meant

what you said and were the master. I wish I might do the love-making for you."

"No, thanks," Romont said, with a brightening smile; "I mean to do my love-making all for myself."

"Very well; but do it."

No one could have been more surprised than Romont himself if he had been told that while he was arguing with Mrs. Pollen he was not perfectly sincere. He thought he was sincere; he believed that he was giving expression to the truest feelings of his heart. But the moment he had left her, the moment he found himself alone, then the real feelings broke out and overwhelmed all others. In the sublime egotism of the lover he yielded himself to the mere rapture of the thought, "She loves me; she loves me; come what will she loves me; nothing can ever alter *that*." He did indeed feel alarmed and a little ashamed as to the part he had played; ashamed on his own account, alarmed at the thought of how Camiola might take it. He felt a little like another Claude Melnotte playing off a shabby trick at the expense of a

beautiful and innocent girl. He began to think he had no more right to find out her secret by means of his mummer's disguise than he would have had to act the part of a spy on her or to open her letters. How would she take it? Mrs. Pollen, of course, was absolutely unscrupulous in such a matter, and could hardly understand Romont's scruples; but would Camiola take that view? Sometimes he felt certain that she would not; that she would resent the trick played off on her. All the same he was determined that she must know it. But for that, he thought, she might be induced to break off her engagement with Georgie Lisle; the disguise and the discovery being actual facts would make her pause, he feared. "Still she loves me," he told himself again and again; "she will never marry *him*."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SAD SUNDAY.

Of all the days that are in the week the dreariest to all outward appearance for Fitzurseham proper, was the day that comes between the Saturday and Monday. The great majority of the inhabitants in the poorer streets never could be induced to go to church. The women had not, as they pleaded, clothes good enough for church; the men did not even entertain the idea of going there. There was a park in the immediate neighbourhood, and people from other quarters came in crowds every Sunday to disport themselves there. But the regular inhabitant of Fitzurseham did not care to go to the park any more than to church. One reason of his for not visiting the park was

that the only house of refreshment within its enclosure was a place where no liquid more stimulating than ginger-beer was allowed to be sold. In the lower quarters of Fitzurseham the men merely hung about with short pipes in their mouths until the public-houses were opened, and as long as the public-houses remained open the men remained in them. At night there was a good deal of singing and shouting to be heard in the public houses, and for a time in the streets after the public-houses had closed; and later still there was a good deal of shrieking from some of the dwelling-houses. Nobody much minded. A wife, perhaps, had been "nagging" her husband, and the husband at last or at first took to beating or kicking the wife. That was common in Fitzurseham, and disturbed nobody but the kicked wife; and even she was so accustomed to it that she could hardly be said to be disturbed by it.

We have to speak now of one particular Sunday, the Sunday after that described in the last chapter. A duller Sunday had not been spent by any one in Fitzurseham than

was spent by Vinnie Lammas and her mother. The mother and daughter had gone to church; they never missed attending church on the Sunday. This Sunday they had both in their minds a particular reason for going which neither would for all the world have hinted, not to say confided, to the other. They were anxious to see if Walter Fitzurse would be there. Walter was not in the habit previously of troubling himself much about going to any church; he always lounged by the river while Vinnie and her mother performed their devotions, and then he used to wait for Vinnie outside the church door, and they would go off on a ramble together. That was in the old days—the dear, dear old days which came to an end only a few weeks ago. Vinnie had not once seen Walter since the night at Fitzurse House; but something told her that he would be at church on the Sunday. She had heard that Mr. and Mrs. Lisle were in London, and that Janette was at the rectory. Walter was at church, and when the service was over he joined Janette and her brother and Camiola, and walked

devoutly by Janette's side. It must not be supposed, however, that he cut the Lammas pair or behaved rudely or unkindly to them. Oh no; he went over and spoke to them in the churchyard; he even left Janette Lisle for a moment to speak to Mrs. and Miss Lammas; he took off his hat to them with the grace and dignity of a lord; he asked after Mrs. Lammas's health, and hoped she had not taken cold, and said Vinnie was looking charming, and that he had not been able to call on them these later days because he had had some business that kept him very much in London. Then he went back to Miss Lisle. It was clear from the first that he meant to go back to her; and they disappeared, Walter, as has been said, walking side by side with Janette. Vinnie had a naturally quick eye; and it was still further quickened in this instance by the eagerness of her mind; and she saw that Janette kept her face turned to the ground while Walter talked to her, and she even saw that there was a heightened colour on Miss Lisle's cheek. How handsome he looked, poor

Vinnie thought; how like a prince!—Vinnie's notions of princes were, it is almost needless to say, taken chiefly from story-books.—And so they went off together in the direction of the rectory, while Vinnie and her mother went the other way. Vinnie dropped her veil, and was for the most part silent, only now and then making some remark of enforced sprightliness far beyond any mortal sprightliness which comes by nature.

Why do people, why do women especially, keep up a deceit which is no deception, which does not in the least deceive those whom it is meant to beguile? Why did Vinnie and her mother now play off this foolish, futile game one against the other? Mrs. Lammas could pierce to the very heart of all poor Vinnie's most secret thoughts. Vinnie was distinctly and altogether aware of this fact. Yet they went on playing at deception, each one knowing perfectly well that it did not deceive. Vinnie talked once or twice of how well Walter was looking and how pretty Miss Lisle was, and how nice it was for Lady Letitia to be so nice to Walter,

and Mrs. Lammas tried to answer in the same strain; and they kept up their little private theatricals in this way until they reached home. In her heart Mrs. Lammas was brooding over one thought which now for some inscrutable reason possessed her. She was thinking of the husband she had lost, the husband of her youth, who had loved his little Vinnie so dearly when she was a child; she was asking herself what he would feel if he were to know that his daughter, his little idol, was breaking her heart because of a faithless lover. Vinnie was thinking of the Sundays which she and her lover used to pass together, and how happy they were; and she could hardly keep down her irritation when her mother spoke to her, and she had to put on again the air of one who is not conscious of anything vexatious, or painful, or out of the way.

They got home, these poor dreary women, and they had their dismal little two-o'clock dinner. Then Vinnie got a book, a novel, and tried, not to read, but to look as if she were reading, mainly in order to avoid being

talked to by her mother. She sat in the window, and kept her eye on the front gate. When she did not look at it she listened for its slightest sound; it must swing on its hinges before any one could enter that house. She still had some hope that Walter would come that day, some time or other, to see her. She longed to see him; longed with an almost sickening craving. Even if all must soon be over with them, still, still she would have liked the evil day postponed; she would like to see him even once again. The day went on, the evening came, the level sunlight shot its darts into the window and dazzled Vinnie so that she could not see the front gate; and Walter did not come.

"Wouldn't you like to go out for a walk, Vinnie dear?" Mrs. Lammas asked timidly.

"Oh no, mamma; the streets are horrid now; they are crowded with noisy people."

"Would you like if we were to run up and see Mrs. Noble—Mollie Noble is at home now, you know."

"No, dear; I don't care about Mollie

Noble. Wouldn't you like to go yourself? You have plenty of time before tea."

Mrs. Lammas sighed, and said she did not care to go.

The evening deepened; and at last Mrs. Lammas lighted the lamp. She did not, however, draw down the blinds, as she knew Vinnie would still like to keep watch, and it was not yet dark; but she lighted the lamp and drew it near her that she might read the Bible and try to distract her thoughts from the concerns of earth. They had an ancient piano, a relic of better days. Vinnie got up from her seat at the window and began to play a hymn; bringing out a good deal of feeling from the keys of the jingling old instrument.

Mrs. Lammas had suppressed all hint of her fears and her doubts thus far; but at last she felt that she must say something. So she began with—"Vinnie dear."

Vinnie, without turning round, asked, "What is it, mamma?"

"Do you think Walter is coming to-night?"

"I don't know, mamma."

Another pause.

"Vinnie dear."

"Yes, mamma."

"Don't you think there is something the matter with Walter? He seemed put out like to-day, I thought."

"Stuff, mamma! You are always fancying there is something wrong with everybody; with Walter and me, at all events. You dear old thing! you wouldn't be happy if you were not frightening yourself and making yourself miserable."

"Well, dear, I am an anxious woman, I know that, and I do often trouble myself about nothing. But still, now don't you really think there was something a little odd in his manner? He hadn't heard any bad news, had he? Does anything trouble him?"

"Now, like a good, dear mammy, please don't worry yourself and tease me. I don't know anything about him; about anything that troubles him. If there is anything, he didn't tell me."

"He would have told you, dearest, surely if there was anything, wouldn't he?"

"I dare say—I dare say. Do stop, mamma." She was a loving daughter, but one of those loving daughters who cannot keep from giving sharp answers now and then. It was her way, indeed, to treat Mrs. Lammas rather as if she were a younger sister than a matron and a mother.

So Mrs. Lammas said no more on the subject just then, but stole a glance at her daughter, and thought none the less because she did not speak.

The girl kept on with her hymn and her piano. The dusk was falling grey and ghostly over the dull, flat, low-lying desolation of the scene without. Her heart was not in her music that evening. She kept ever and anon glancing at the darkening window, expecting or hoping from minute to minute to hear the gate move, and then a familiar step. More and more the shadows deepened; more and more the pleasant glow of the lamp reddened in the dusk; and no one came. Mrs. Lammas bent her head

over her reading; she could not see through the window from where she was sitting, but her ear watched with painful tension to hear the gate turn on its rusty hinges; and the gate remained silent as herself. The sounds of the piano grew slower and slower, and presently ceased altogether; and the mother could see that her daughter was only gazing at the darkening window-panes. At last Vinnie closed the piano and got up.

"Don't you want your tea, poor dear old mother?" she said, in a tone of unusual softness and tenderness. "Shan't I get it ready? It's growing ever so late. It has positively grown quite dark. What a patient old mother you are to wait all this time and never say a word!"

"Don't you think we had better wait a little longer, Vinnie?"

"For what, dear?"

"For Walter; he may come later."

"For Walter!" The girl broke out into a wild hysterical laugh, which sounded unearthly and uncanny in the dusk, and quite frightened Mrs. Lammas.

"My dear child!" she exclaimed.

"He'll never come any more, mamma; never, never. He doesn't care about me any more. I have lost him; oh, it's too bad, too bad; he doesn't care for me any more!"

She flung herself on her knees beside Mrs. Lammas, and hid her face like a child in her mother's lap, and gave full way to all the hysterical pain and passion that was in her. The mother stroked her hair and soothed and petted her with hardly articulate words of tenderness, as one tries to soothe a child or some suffering dumb creature, but did not for the moment try to interfere by question or remonstrance with the rush of her grief; let the blood flow freely from the bruised and wounded heart. Mrs. Lammas always became helpful and strong and judicious when anything had to be done for anybody; and she knew every turn and mood and tone of her daughter's nature. The wild stream of grief and pain checked itself at last—stopped from sheer exhaustion—and the girl raised her head.

"That's done me good," she said, with a

sickly attempt to smile. "Good gracious, mamma, what a fool I am!"

"We are all like that, my dear, we women, when we are young and when we are in love," Mrs. Lammas said. "But tell me, my dear child, what put that foolish notion into your head? What made you think that Walter doesn't care about you any more?" Mrs. Lammas had just the same foolish notion in her own head.

"It's not foolish, mamma; it's too true. It was foolish of me to give way so; but what I say is the truth. He doesn't care for me any more. He never will care for me again. I know it; something has told me of it. I feel it in my very heart. Oh, I have been thinking of it these some days, although I wouldn't let on even to you; and you have been thinking of it too. He is in love with Miss Lisle. I don't wonder; I don't blame him, hardly. How could he help it? She's a handsome girl and she's a lady, and has culture, and is grand, and all that; and she's very nice to him and kind to him, and, oh, so different from a poor little ignorant

girl like me—and—and—there—that's all about it."

"But he must be mad if he thinks of her; a lady like that; he must be crazy."

"What's the good of that to me, mamma, even if he is crazy? I suppose young men in love often are crazy. He's in love with her, and that's enough for me. I have lost him; that's the point so far as I am concerned." She was trying to pluck up a little of her usual spirit, but the effort was not very successful.

"He'll be sorry for this one day—if it's true," Mrs. Lammas exclaimed.

"Not he, mamma; why should he? He'll be sorry if he doesn't get her; but he'll not be sorry for me. It's common enough in life, surely, for a man to throw over one girl for another, when he likes the other better; it happens every day; only we don't like it when it's brought home to ourselves; that's all. I dare say I shouldn't have minded if he had thrown over some other girl for me; I shouldn't have troubled myself much about that girl's feelings. Now it's my own case, and I have to bear it."

The gate was heard to move upon its rusty hinges. Mrs. Lammas looked up with eagerness and hope.

"It's not he," Vinnie said. "It's—it's Mr. Pilgrim, I think."

Mrs. Lammas was glad it was anybody. Mr. Pilgrim or another was welcome, in the hope that he might break the gloom. To women of Mrs. Lammas's age and temperament the two most dreaded things in any trouble are loneliness and silence. It was Mr. Pilgrim. He came in, looking more pale and ghostlike than ever. Mrs. Lammas had always been glad to see Mr. Pilgrim. At one time he used to visit them a great deal, while he was teaching Vinnie shorthand. For the last few weeks, however, they had not seen him. He was busy, naturally, about the renovation of Fitzurse House. Mrs. Lammas had a sort of idea that Pilgrim rather fancied Vinnie, which idea amused her and made her feel kindly and pitying towards poor Pilgrim. Think of Vinnie caring for a man of his age; even if there were not the handsome young lover, Walter Fitzurse!

But Mrs. Lammas made up her mind that if Walter were not in the way, Mr. Pilgrim would make love to Vinnie. Now she gave Pilgrim a welcome which was more than usually cordial. It was an intense relief to her that he had come in to disturb their solitude.

"You'll have some tea with us, Mr. Pilgrim, won't you?" the widow said; and she made signs at Pilgrim that he was to say "Yes."

Pilgrim said a gloomy "Yes." He saw that some trouble was in the air. He was much troubled himself; but he felt for the Lammases. He liked both mother and daughter very much; he was really fond of Vinnie, although not in the way Mrs. Lammas imagined. He took a genuine interest in the girl; he thought her far too good and too quick-witted to be thrown away upon forlorn Fitzurseham. He had long known of her attachment to Walter, and of her engagement with him, and he did not think the prospect for her altogether satisfactory even before the Lisles had come back to Fitzurseham. He had had an intimate

knowledge of Walter since Walter was a child, and he saw down to the very depths of that restless, egotistic, ambitious, dreamy nature. He knew that Walter was in love with himself and not with any girl; or rather with the Eidolon, the image of Walter Fitzurse, which he had created for himself, and on which the eyes of his soul were for ever turned in admiring contemplation. Perhaps if Camiola Sabine had not come in his way poor Pilgrim's vague unconsolidated yearnings for love might have centred themselves on Vinnie; but Camiola Sabine came in his way, and we have seen what happened to him.

Mrs. Lammas left the room in order to occupy herself in preparations for tea.

"I haven't seen much of you lately, Vinnie."

"No, Mr. Pilgrim. You don't come to see us."

"I have been so busy. I hope you are not neglecting your shorthand practice."

"I haven't been doing much lately," the girl said listlessly. "I don't suppose I shall

ever make much of it. Have you seen Walter to-day?" she asked timidly.

"No; I haven't seen him to-day, Vinnie."

"Not all the day? Not at any time to-day?"

"Not at any time to-day; or yesterday. I haven't seen him these many days. He doesn't care much about me now," Pilgrim added, with a certain bitterness. "He has his grand friends." He had hardly spoken the words when he was sorry for having uttered them.

Poor Vinnie burst into tears. "Oh, and he doesn't care for me either," she sobbed, "any more—any more. He has given me up; he has thrown me over. Oh, Mr. Pilgrim, I am so much ashamed to be seen by you and giving way like this! Why can't I have some self-control?"

"There, there," Pilgrim said hurriedly and awkwardly, for he did not know in the least how to set about consoling or soothing a girl under the circumstances. "Never mind, Vinnie dear; never mind, that's a good child."

"How can I help minding?" was the not unreasonable question. "My heart is breaking; it's broken, I think."

"Hearts don't break," Pilgrim exclaimed, so suddenly and fiercely that the girl stopped in her wail and looked wonderingly at him; "they don't break; I wish to God they did!"

"Why, Mr. Pilgrim, what *is* the matter? You look quite put out—quite wild. Has anything happened?" His voice and manner frightened her; she drew away from him.

"Do you think I am going mad?" he asked grimly. "I am not; I wish I could go mad, girl."

"Mr. Pilgrim, I don't think you ought to talk in that way. Fancy wishing that you were mad! I wish I was dead, but I don't wish I was mad. Oh, God forbid!"

"Well, Vinnie, one doesn't die for wishing it; and I suppose one doesn't go mad for wishing it. However, I think you are right in rebuking me for making such an exhibition of myself; and it was not for that I came here."

"Tell me something about him—about Walter; please do," she entreated.

"I have little to tell. He does not live in this place any longer. He has ceased to be a grub and has turned into quite the butterfly; quite the butterfly. In plainer words, Vinnie, he is living now at the West End, *in* handsome lodgings, and is exhibiting himself as a regular fine gentleman."

"But, Mr. Pilgrim, where does he get the money?"

Vinnie was positively astonished out of her grief for the moment. Her personal suffering had gone down before the shock of mere curiosity.

"It isn't for me to say anything about that." Pilgrim knew, of course, that Walter had been enabled by Mrs. Pollen thus to enter upon the butterfly stage of his existence; but Pilgrim never breathed a word of anything done by Mrs. Pollen unless he had her express directions to do so. In this case he had no faith in the success of her experiment; nor indeed had she much, by this time.

"Well, I have lost him anyhow," Vinnie said wearily, sinking down in sheer dejection once again.

"I have come to you with a message," Pilgrim said.

"From Walter; oh, from Walter?" The sudden wild light that came into poor Vinnie's eyes was sad to see for one who knew the disappointment that must follow.

"Not from Walter, Vinnie; you know I am not likely to be made a messenger by Walter. You said this moment that you had lost him. Have you made up your mind to that, or have you not? Has he left you, or has he not?"

"But one always hopes; one keeps hoping," Vinnie pleaded.

"My poor child, yes," Pilgrim said very kindly and tenderly; and he put his hand on her curly head. She was seated or squatted on the hearth beside him. "For one who is young like you there is always hope, thank God. I ought to have thought of that. I ought to have remembered that you were not like me. Well, I have brought you a

message. Don't you want to know what it is?"

"Oh yes, Mr. Pilgrim." She did not, however, seem particularly eager about it.

"It is from Mrs. Pollen."

"Yes?" To all appearance she had not any great concern in the purport of the message.

Mrs. Lammas had just come back into the room.

"She wants to see you to-morrow, up at Fitzurse House. She takes a great interest in you, Vinnie; and I shouldn't wonder if she wanted you to become her secretary."

Once this message would have made Vinnie dance about her room with joy. Now she took it wearily.

"I don't think I could do it, Mr. Pilgrim; I don't indeed."

Mrs. Lammas sighed. "Things don't ever seem to come at the right time," she said. She was thinking that but a few weeks ago the proffered patronage of the rich and beneficent Mrs. Pollen would have set Vinnie wild with delight, and now Vinnie

did not seem to care in the least about it; apparently regarded it rather as a trouble.

"She is a kind woman and a good woman," Pilgrim said, almost sternly; "it will do you good to talk to her; you may tell her anything you like—or indeed you need not tell her much; she will understand what you mean before you have said it."

"I don't want to talk to any one," Vinnie murmured. "I think I only want to be let alone."

She got up and began to walk about the little room. She walked with listless air and with a curiously heavy tread. It would seem as if the weight at her heart had sent lead into her feet as well.

"She'll go to see the lady to-morrow, of course, Mr. Pilgrim," Mrs. Lammas said. "It's very kind of Mrs. Pollen, I'm sure; and Vinnie feels it just as well as I do; only she's a little put out, to-night, with things."

Vinnie had now come to a stand by the window, and was staring out into the darkening night. Pilgrim went quietly up to her.

"I am sorry to see you in trouble, Vinnie;

indeed I am. I feel for you very much; you are one of the few human creatures I really care about; but you'll get over this, my dear child; you'll get over this: you are young."

"It's no use telling me I'll get over it," Vinnie cried out passionately. "There's no comfort to me in being told that I'll get over it. I don't want to get over it. Why should I? How could I? It won't make any difference a few days passing, will it? I shall be the same, and—and—he'll be the same; he has left me; and—and what's the use of talking? Oh, there; I am ashamed of myself; but you don't understand, Mr. Pilgrim—I suppose a man couldn't understand—how one hates to be comforted and cheered up, and all that; how one hates every one in the world, friends and all—when one feels as I do now. Oh, I don't know what I am saying, but I'll not bear this trouble. I'll not bear it. I know that."

Vinnie hurried out of the room.

"Won't you go after her?" Pilgrim asked.

"Oh no," Mrs. Lammas said sadly; "it's

better not, Mr. Pilgrim; she is better left to herself. Girls are so queer in these ways. She has always been the best of daughters; but I know there are times when it would only worry her if even her mother were to go to her. No; she's better left alone just for a little. Are you going? Good night, Mr. Pilgrim; I'm sorry we were so dull when you came." She looked very miserable.

"It is better sometimes to go to the house of mourning than the house of feasting," he said. "That is," he added, in his curious meditative way, "if we look upon the house of mourning as something got up entirely for the spiritual improvement of the people who do not happen to be mourners just at that moment. In that way I am improving myself at your expense and that of poor Vinnie, Mrs. Lammas."

Mrs. Lammas did not understand in the least what he meant or what he was talking about. Pilgrim left the house and walked slowly towards his home. The soft, warm breath of the summer evening still lingered everywhere. The artistic touch of the

gathering dusk delicately effaced from sight all commonplace or unsightly outlines and objects, and the dull street might have been a path in an Arcadian village. Groups of people were wandering here and there; and Pilgrim passed many a couple whose subdued whisper as they went along told the lovers' tale as clearly as it could be told under Sicilian boughs. There was bitterness in Pilgrim's heart, and he saw with soured sentiment each happy, whispering pair. One couple in particular attracted his attention. The girl was pretty; the young man was better dressed than she, and seemed to belong to a better class.

"All right," Pilgrim murmured almost aloud as he turned and looked after them. "Enjoy your Sunday evening, my pretty, fond little girl, while you can. There will soon come a Sunday when he won't care to keep his appointment with you, and what will you do then? Will you remember that there is a river near, I wonder? I shouldn't be surprised if Vinnie Lammas was thinking of something of the kind just now."

He walked on and soon came in sight of the river. It set him thinking as he looked this way and that along the darkling stream; this way towards London, where the cloud of dull orange glow was resting; that way to the green fields, and woods, and delicious back-waters, and overhanging trees which he could not see, but could think of, could picture to himself; the fields where when a boy he had never played, the trees which he had never had time or heart to climb, all the rich and various beauties of the landscape which his hard life had never allowed him to enjoy while he was still within the years that leave enjoyment a chance. He was not now thinking of himself, however, or of his lost youth. As he looked on the filling river —the tide was still coming in—he was more and more thinking of Vinnie Lammas and of her ominous words as she was leaving the room. What if she were to come down to the river that night? It was the natural thing, the familiar thing, the hideously common thing for a deserted girl to do. Not a day's paper that does not tell some

such sad and frequent story. What if Vinnie should come that Sunday evening to the churchyard where on other Sunday evenings she used to meet her lover, and should seek for rest in the rising waters of the river? That spot which so often saw her happiness, which must be associated in her mind with the best hours of happiness she had ever known—what place could be more appropriate for a broken-hearted girl's farewell to life? The thought began to fill Pilgrim's perturbed mind. It grew to be a conviction, a fixed forecast with him. "I will stay here; I will watch," he determined. "If she ever attempts it she will attempt it this very night, and from the wall of the churchyard."

CHAPTER XIX.

"RIVER OF REMORSE AND INNOCENCY."

SUDDENLY Pilgrim was hailed from the road out of which he had turned to reach the river-side.

"Hallo, Pilgrim!"

"Mr. Romont, is it you?"

"Why, certainly, Pilgrim! You look a little surprised to see me!"

"Well, yes; I am a little surprised, Mr. Romont."

Pilgrim became rather embarrassed. He would have said, if he had spoken out his mind, "I am surprised to see you going about openly in your ordinary costume and your own person, seeing that you are supposed to be somewhere far out of London, and that Albanian Joseph is still supposed to be in

Fitzurseham." Pilgrim had never asked a question or said a word to him about Albanian Joseph; but he knew perfectly well who Albanian Joseph was, and Romont always knew he did. What little plot Mrs. Pollen and Romont had in hand Pilgrim could not guess, but he had a vague presentiment borne in upon him, he could not tell how, that it would prove to have something to do with Camiola Sabine. He knew it would be some purpose of good to her, but his heart was sad all the same. Every thought of her wounded him. He had not seen her since that fatal day when he made such a lamentable exhibition of his madness, and he dreaded to look her in the face again.

"I am in Fitzurseham again, Pilgrim, as you see. There is a time for folly and a time to be sane. I am trying to be sane just now."

"Were you up at the house? Were you looking for me?"

"No; I haven't been up at Fitzurse House; and the truth is, I wasn't looking for you, Pilgrim. But I am glad to see you

all the same. Are you meditating on the flowing on of life as you look at that shining river?"

There was an enforced gaiety in Romont's manner which did not escape even Pilgrim's notice.

"Have you been at the rectory, Mr. Romont? Have you heard how Mr. George is getting on?

"No; I haven't been at the rectory, Pilgrim—at least I didn't go in, and I didn't make any inquiry; and I haven't the slightest doubt that Mr. George is getting on as well as his most devoted friends could possibly desire. That sort of fellow always does get on all right, don't you think?"

Pilgrim wondered what could have induced Mr. Romont to walk to the rectory and not go in or even make an inquiry. Romont had been in a restless mood all the evening, and he had wandered away vaguely from St. James's Street, and found himself at last idly lounging round and round that part of Fitzurseham where the rectory stood. If there be any man or woman still young or

having memory of youth who requires to be told, as Christian Pilgrim apparently did, why Romont hovered in the neighbourhood of the rectory, then on that man or woman are love stories and love's experiences thrown utterly away.

"But what are you doing here, Pilgrim? You look like a watcher; as if you were on the look out for something?"

"I am on the look out for something, Mr. Romont; perhaps you will think me absurd if I tell you."

"My good fellow, what does it matter whether I think you absurd or not? What does it matter whether you are absurd or not? Are we not all absurd, every one of us, at almost any hour in the day? I hope to Heaven that you are tremendously, insanely, preposterously absurd, Pilgrim; because you will then keep me all the better in countenance."

"I know, at least, that you won't laugh at what I am going to say to you."

"I don't think I feel much in the laughing humour, Pilgrim; but go ahead."

At another time Pilgrim might have paid serious attention to Romont's words and manner, and might even, in his humble, friendly way, have pressed for some explanation. Now his mind was absorbed in one thought. He told his thought to Romont in as few words as he could put it into. Romont did not laugh, but shook his head very gravely.

"Of course, this is mere conjecture, Pilgrim, and there may be nothing in it."

"Of course; of course, Mr. Romont."

"But still," Romont said, "I am almost inclined to think with you that something bad may be coming. Things do look ominous, and I am absurd even to attach some importance to the fact that the notion has taken so strong a hold on your mind. If she ever were going to do it, here, certainly, would be the likeliest spot. Anyhow, no harm can come of our waiting and watching."

"Will you keep me company, Mr. Romont?"

"Of course I will. I am just thinking what we had better do. Look here! we'll

get into one of these little boats. There's one lying off the Old Ferry Inn—we'll get into it and just go out mid-stream and get behind one of the big barges there, and keep our eyes fixed on the shore and the churchyard wall. Makes one feel creepy, doesn't it? But that's the thing to do, you may be sure. If the attempt is made here, Pilgrim, we can save her."

"What would you think, Mr. Romont, now that you are here to keep watch, if I were to go back to Mrs. Lammas's house and tell her of our suspicions, and get her to look after Vinnie?"

"Wouldn't think about it at all, Pilgrim."

"No, Mr. Romont?"

"No."

"Not tell the girl's mother and put her on her guard?"

"Certainly not, Pilgrim."

Pilgrim was absolutely dumfounded. Not to go at once and tell the girl's mother; not to put her on her guard; not to have some restraint used with Vinnie! This was marvellous. Only his implicit faith in Romont could stand it.

"My good fellow," Romont said, "don't you see that if the girl is bent on killing herself nothing on earth can prevent her trying? To go and frighten her mother, and set her mother to frighten her, would be the stupidest policy in the world. It would only come to this, that Vinnie would put off her attempt to some time and place where we should not be standing by to prevent her. The best thing we can do is to let her try here under our very eyes."

Pilgrim's breath was almost taken away.

"But suppose we don't succeed in saving her?"

"Of course we'll save her. What is the matter with us? If she does come here the thing is easy; and if she doesn't come here, then we can't tell where she may go. It is an off chance, but it is a chance; I think she will come here."

"Then don't you think we should stop her?"

"No; no, no. The only thing is to let her go right into the river. Many a girl when once she is in would endure the worst suffer-

ings in life to be out again. If they are pulled out they become ashamed of the whole affair, the row, and the scandal, and the exposure, and all the rest of it; and they get back to their better senses. No; girls don't often try that sort of thing a second time."

"I suppose you are right, Mr. Romont. You are sure you can save her?"

"Of course; of course. My good fellow, do you think I never saved any one from drowning in my life?" Romont spoke as if saving people from drowning were one of the commonest incidents in an ordinary man's life.

"I am sure I never did," said Pilgrim, sadly.

"Lots of things you never did, Pilgrim. But there's one thing I know you can do, and that is—obey orders."

"Yes, I can do that."

"Very well, then. If anything should happen—if we should see anything, you had better let me boss this business—let me manage it all, if you don't mind."

"Certainly, Mr. Romont."

"I think I am a cooler hand, don't you know; and if this should happen we must bear in mind that we haven't merely to prevent the poor thing from coming to any harm just now, but we have to prevent her from ever trying it on again. Do you understand what I mean now, Pilgrim?"

"I don't think I do, Mr. Romont; but it doesn't matter, if you do. I'll just take my orders."

"All right; you will understand after."

There was silence for some moments. Nothing was heard by the two watching men but the lapping of the water against their own boat, and round the bows of the barge behind which they lay sheltered, and the occasional barking of a dog on shore, and the chiming of a clock in some belfry tower.

"Ten o'clock! If she is coming at all," Pilgrim said in a low whisper, "she won't be long now. Keep a sharp look out, Mr. Romont; your sight is better than mine."

"Why do you think it will be soon now?"

"She will wait until her mother has gone to bed—that will be before ten."

"Oh."

There was another pause, and for a longer time. Pilgrim was growing almost sick with nervous anxiety. Although there was no moon the skies were singularly clear, and the eye travelled far under that luminous atmosphere. The watchers were peering cautiously out from behind the shelter of the barge and her heavy rudder. There must have been many feet of water under the old churchyard wall. There was rather a strong current running towards London.

"Hush!" said Romont, in a voice so low that the ripple of the waves was noise to it. His quick ears had caught the sound of some movement like the crunching of gravel in the churchyard. The gates of the churchyard were always closed at nights, but there was a kind of roadway, or "hard," running down to the river, parallel with that one of the churchyard walls which ran from the river inland, and parts of this wall were so low, and the rough roadway mounted in places so high, that any one could easily get over the wall and in among the graves and tombs.

Unquestionably some one had leaped down from the wall into the churchyard; and now a hurried, irregular tread could be heard by the watchers behind the barge.

Yes; it was a girl. Pilgrim had guessed aright. The figure of a woman was plainly seen now by both the men. The woman came to the wall which looked over the river, and stood a moment and stared across the waters and up at the sky and back on the church itself. Then she flung off her bonnet and shawl and mounted on to the wall. She stood there one moment, and a half-suppressed cry or moan broke from her.

Pilgrim was about to push off the boat and shout to the girl to stop, but Romont seized him by the shoulder and held him in his place, making at the same time vehement gestures to him to keep quiet. It needed all Pilgrim's confidence in Romont's judgment to enable him to keep quiet at such a moment. "She will do it!" he said to his own affrighted soul; she will do it in a second while we are waiting here." Yes; he was right. She has done it. She sprang wildly from the wall, a

splash and a stifled shriek were heard, and poor Vinnie Lammas was in the Thames.

"Keep quiet," said Romont almost harshly to Pilgrim. "Sit still, don't stir; leave this to me."

He took the sculls as quietly as if he were merely about to amuse himself with a late paddle on the river, and gently pushed the boat away from the shelter of the dark barge. Pilgrim covered his face with his hands. He could not bear to look up or around him. Romont sculled the boat lightly with the current, shooting several rapid strokes ahead, and looking keenly out over his shoulder the while.

"Now then, Pilgrim, here we are!"

Getting courage from Romont's cool composure, Pilgrim looked up, and made ready to do something, he did not quite know what. Romont was resting on his oars and waiting. Suddenly Pilgrim saw something come floating, bobbing, dancing down the stream. It was the back of a woman's head. He could see nothing but that at first; it seemed like a curly-haired head, with no body attached.

"All right," said Romont, in a low, reassuring tone; and, shipping his sculls, he crept over Pilgrim to the stern of the boat, and put both his arms under Vinnie's head, and held it up by the short curling hair. "Catch hold of the sculls, Pilgrim, and pull like mad for the shore."

Romont was in reality much excited, but he spoke as composedly as if all this sort of thing were happening every day.

"For the barge, Mr. Romont?" Pilgrim asked, in doubt and excitement.

"No, no! for the shore! Man alive, we couldn't get her into this boat, and we couldn't get the barge ashore. Go ahead!"

Pilgrim was pulling with heroic vigour and unheroic awkwardness. A very few strokes brought them close up to the landing-place just under the churchyard. Romont here stepped into the water and lifted Vinnie out of it. He was now standing on the shore, holding her in his arms, her pallid, corpse-like face resting on his shoulder. She was still insensible, but full of life and shivering all over.

"Take off your coat, Pilgrim, and wrap it tightly round her—wrap it as if you were wrapping a mummy; that will get some heat into her again. Good; very well done. Now, just contrive somehow to get off this coat of mine; bear a hand this way. Gently now while I just lift her head a little. There—there—quietly. Don't stir her more than you can help. That's it; all right. Now wrap my coat tightly round her feet and ankles. That's the way. Now then, you had better carry her; this way, don't you see, just as you would carry a child. And now we had better start. I'll just make fast the boat."

Romont had a kind of idea that, when Vinnie came to and heard what had happened, she would rather know that she had been carried in the arms of the elder than of the younger man.

"One moment, Pilgrim." Romont employed his handkerchief to dry as well as he could Vinnie's curly hair and her face. "Now, stoop down—kneel down; she must have swallowed a lot of water. Hold her

head just a little this way; yes, that will be all right."

A little torrent of water gushed from the girl's mouth, as Romont had expected that it would; and she sobbed and shuddered convulsively, opened her eyes once or twice in a sightless way, and sank off again insensible, but evidently relieved.

"Now we may go on again; but not too fast. Is she very cold?"

"I don't think she is so very cold now, Mr. Romont; except her face, perhaps."

"No matter about that; just keep these coats round her as tightly as you can. The women won't be long getting her plenty of hot blankets up at the house, I suppose? Shall I run on before and tell them?"

"At what house, Mr. Romont?"

"Why at Fitzurse House, to be sure."

"But there's nobody there."

They kept going on all the same, for as yet they had not reached the main road, and only when they got there would it be necessary for them to decide. It had not occurred to Romont that there could be any difficulty

about carrying the rescued girl up to Fitzurse House at once. For a moment he became puzzled, when Pilgrim interposed his practical objection.

"By Jove! I never thought of that. Are there no women to-night up at the house?"

"Not a ghost of a woman. Mrs. Pollen and her maid went away hours ago."

"Then there's nothing for it but to take her to the rectory. We can't go into the Old Ferry Inn and have all Fitzurseham gaping over the story for the next week; and if we took her home we should only frighten her mother into fits, and find no one else who could do a hand's turn for the poor child. The rectory is a place we have all a claim on; and there are women enough there."

They were now tramping briskly along. Pilgrim found his physical strength come in useful to him now. He was carrying Vinnie with as much ease and tender care as if she were a little sick child.

"She will recover, Mr. Romont?" he asked plaintively, with his eyes fixed on the little dark and damp head that rested on his shoulder.

"Recover? of course she will. Her heart was beating nicely a moment ago. Here we are. She will be in better hands here than yours or mine, Pilgrim."

As they made for the door of the rectory Romont was thinking that he was sure to see Camiola, and was wondering what she would say when she saw this sudden apparition, and was wishing in his secret soul that he was in Vinnie Lammas's condition, on the off chance that Camiola might have to do something for him.

CHAPTER XX.

"THIS NIGHT—TO MEET HERE!"

THE rectory received Vinnie and her bearers with less excitement and confusion than might have been expected. In truth, there had been of late a remarkable renewal of relations between the rectory and the poverty of Fitzurseham; and the lawn and the gate were made the scene of many an appeal for counsel and help under various distressing and professing-to-be-distressed conditions. The servants, like the master and mistress, were getting pretty well drilled to the work. The master and the mistress were not at home when Vinnie was brought in; but Camiola and Janette were there, and Janette had been doing a good deal of ministering to the poor and sick lately, and Camiola was, in

her way, as quick, cool, and practical as Romont himself. "I come from the working lot, you know," she was fond of saying; "and it is natural to me to turn a hand to anything." So Vinnie was quickly got into bed and nearly smothered in hot blankets, and a medical man was sent for from the town, who was at first elated at receiving a summons to the rectory, was then a little dashed in his pride when he found the patient was only poor Vinnie Lammas, and was restored to self-respect on discovering that it was a case of restoration from drowning which must become a fame all over the neighbourhood.

Christian Pilgrim found that there was nothing for him to do, and he therefore went drearily away, and wandered aimlessly for hours. He had not even seen Camiola; he did not want to see her; he dreaded the thought of seeing her. He fancied that, for all her kindness of heart and her generous words to him, she must in her soul despise and dislike him because of the unlucky exhibition he had made of his ridiculous passion. He pictured her in his own mind as quietly

laughing to herself over her grisly, old, and pauper lover. He began to think now that Romont was in love with her, and this made him feel only more and more ashamed of himself and his folly. So he wandered about long lonely roads in much shame and misery, heartily wishing that he were in the Thames to remain there.

Romont hung about the house and the lawn in his wet clothes, not caring or knowing whether they were wet or dry. He was determined now not to leave the place until he had spoken to Camiola and told her everything. All day long he had been doubting and hesitating; feeling little satisfaction in the part he had played, and sadly afraid that Camiola would feel less satisfaction in it still. Now, however, as fate seemed to have driven him within the gate of the rectory, he was determined that all should come out and an end be put to the matter one way or the other. The night was, as we have said, clear and soft; the stars shone in a pure deep blue. Even to Romont's perturbed soul the charm of the summer night air and of the

light breath from the west brought a sense of hope. After all that had been done it was not yet nearly eleven o'clock.

Camiola had had her own trouble all day, and some troubles, too, that were not her own. She had to come to a decision about Janette Lisle. Janette had all but confessed to her that she was about to elope with her lover, Walter Fitzurse, before her father and mother came back from London. Walter was convinced that Mr. Lisle and Lady Letitia would not hear of his proposal for their daughter, and he was determined on carrying off the girl and marrying her at once. Janette implied that he had already made the necessary arrangements, and Camiola found argument, and appeal, and remonstrance, and passionate loving entreaty utterly thrown away upon the brain-sick girl. What was Camiola to do? The rector and Lady Letitia would not be home until the night following; Georgie, even if he could be of much use, was not near. He had been persuaded to go to town to dine quietly with a comrade in arms who had just been sent

back with despatches from Egypt, and in consequence of the state of his health he was to stay with his friend until the morning. Mrs. Pollen was not at hand. What was Camiola to do? She must take counsel with some one. In her despair she resolved when she saw Romont enter the house that she would take counsel with him.

Therefore Romont, standing on the lawn with his back to a tree and his eyes on the house, saw a figure come from the open hall and through the doorway and out on the lawn. His heart beat fast; for it was Camiola. She was bareheaded; she was looking for something. "The time has come," he thought; "now for it."

Suddenly she saw him, and he thought she would draw back, and he was about to call to her and run towards her, fearing lest the longed-for, dreaded opportunity might be lost. But when she saw him she called to him and came towards him, panting and speaking very quickly in agitated, tremulous tones.

"Oh, Mr. Romont! I am so glad; I was afraid you had gone. I want to speak to

you so much." She stopped and put her hand upon her beating heart.

"Yes," he said, "and I want to speak to you, too."

"Oh, well—— I have sent one of the maids to poor Mrs. Lammas to waken her up and bring her here. That was the best thing to do, don't you think?"

"Certainly; of course."

"She will be here soon. Vinnie is nearly all right now."

"Yes; I thought she would be. She won't do it again?"

"I hope not—oh, I think not. She is very much ashamed and penitent, poor child. Heaven help her! But it wasn't about that I wanted to speak to you."

He waited patiently, not wondering so much about what she had to tell him as wondering what she would say when she heard what he had to tell her.

"It's about Janette, Mr. Romont. I am afraid she has allowed me to guess at a great secret of hers, and what am I to do? I have to speak to you," she said almost

angrily; "there is no one else." She told him her story in a few direct words.

"This is a serious business," Romont said.

"Yes, what am I to do? Tell me."

"Send for Mr. Lisle and Lady Letitia at once."

"You think so? You are sure I ought to do that? Would that be a breach of confidence? Is it a thing a man would do? Is it a thing you would do if you were in my place?"

"Most certainly. You said she did not actually confide this to you as a secret."

"No; she let it out, rather. We were alone, and we were talking together over things—not very gladsome, perhaps, and it was evening, and melancholy; and Janette became almost hysterical, and I got to know or guess somehow—from the way she clung to me and kissed me, and begged me always to think well of her—I knew that something was going to happen. How I came to know it I can't quite tell now. Then you would tell her father and Lady Letitia?"

"Of course I would. I would save the

child from that fellow at any risk. If you only knew all about him! Look here, Miss Sabine, he took me in at first; but now I know what sort of a cad he is. He has already got mixed up with one of the worst lots of fast men about town, and he adores them because some of them are swells, you know, and he delights in their titles and all that, and being seen with them. I don't believe he really cares about Janette; in fact, I know, oh—well, there"—he was near being hurried into the statement of certain facts which led him to believe that Walter's affections were at all events not wholly absorbed by Janette—"he is a bad lot, and getting worse and worse. He has no money, and he has no way of making any, unless he makes it by gambling; and I believe he is no more a Fitzurse than you or I."

"Janette knows that he hasn't much money; he hasn't deceived her about *that*. She doesn't mind."

"Much money? He hasn't any money."

"But he must have had money—some money?"

"He has only what Mrs. Pollen chooses to give him, and I don't believe she will give him much more. She is beginning to find him out; and little as I like to do any fellow a bad turn, if I can help her to find him out I will. Don't you know that it was on his account little Vinnie tried to drown herself?"

"No; I didn't know that," Camiola said, with eyes of astonishment.

"No; and of course Janette didn't know it. And you didn't know, either of you, that the fellow was living on Mrs. Pollen's bounty?"

"But surely now, Mr. Romont, even you must admit that there must be something good in him when Mrs. Pollen takes such an interest in him? Come, now, you will own that much?"

"Well, Mrs. Pollen is a dear, kind, noble-hearted creature—I found that out long ago. God bless her! But she makes mistakes, I suppose, like others. She thought this fellow was a sort of Claude Melnotte kept down by iron fortune, who only wanted a helping hand to become a hero and a genius, and all

that. And then she has found out, I believe, that he is in some way or other related to her husband, and she wanted to make a man of this creature; but I think now she is beginning to give it up as a bad job."

"I am so glad I spoke to you, Mr. Romont. This is dreadful—much worse than I ever could have imagined; but I am all the more glad that I spoke to you. Janette must be saved, no matter by what means, come what will."

"She must be saved from him, if it has to be done by putting her into a strait-waistcoat. The thing is how to get at Mr. Lisle at once. Can you answer for her to-night?"

"If you think we are right in this, and I have no one near me to speak to about it but you"—she felt her cheek grow flame hot as she spoke the words—"I will keep her here by force if needs be until her father and mother come. You may depend upon that, Mr. Romont; and, thank Heaven, I am a good deal stronger than darling little Janette. I could carry her about like a child. I will send a letter to Lady Letitia."

"Yes; write it and give it to me. I will see Mr. Lisle if possible to-night, but if I can't, then the very first thing in the morning. He shall be here with Lady Letitia before you are all out of bed. You go and write the letter at once. Make it short—it can't be too short—and give it to me. We must have no talk and scandal in all this if we possibly can prevent it."

"Very well; I'll go and write. Will you come in?"

"No; I'll stay here. But you'll come back with the letter yourself?" he asked anxiously. "I told you I had something to say to you."

"Yes; I had forgotten that for the moment." She was embarrassed, although she had not the faintest idea of what he was going to tell her. She hurried away, but was not long gone. She came back with the letter in her hand. "Would you like to read it?" she asked. "I haven't sealed it."

"It will be all right, I am sure. I will seal it by-and-by. Now, Camiola, I have something to say to you."

She started at the sound of her name thus spoken by him. His voice was deep, and trembling with emotion. She was drawing back a little in a sort of alarm.

"I have something to say which is of the utmost importance to you and to me." He put his hand round her wrist and held it firmly, so that she could not get it away. Indeed, she did not try; she had no time to pay heed to anything but the words that were coming from him. What is he going to say? "And I shall not keep you in suspense; I'll come to the point. It is this—I love you, Camiola—and I know now—that you love me."

She gave a little cry and plucked her wrist from him. He did not hold it.

"Oh, for shame!" she said. "Mrs. Pollen told you!"

A rush of wild and almost fearful rapture went through him. She did not even attempt to deny it; only, "Mrs. Pollen told you." That was all; the truth was owned.

"I know it from better evidence than Mrs. Pollen could give," he said gravely. "She

didn't tell me. I know it from your own eyes and your own lips, Camiola. I stood by and heard you in all but so many words acknowledge that you love me."

"Oh, but that is impossible! It is impossible; it can't be; it couldn't be. I haven't seen you for days and days."

"Yes, you have; oh yes, you have. Don't you remember Joseph, the Albanian boatman who rowed you on the river yesterday?"

"Yes, yes. What about him?"

"I am Joseph, the Albanian boatman."

"You!"

"Yes; look here!" He assumed one of the habitual attitudes of Joseph, folded his arms across his chest, and stood with eyes turned to the earth, and he spoke a few words in the queer Levantine Italian in which Mrs. Pollen and he used to interchange ideas. His face was dark against the sky, and the features were not clearly seen. He appeared for the moment just Joseph, the Albanian, once again.

Then Camiola remembered that when she

broke into tears in Mrs. Pollen's music-room, as Mrs. Pollen pressed her with questions about Romont, the seeming Albanian started forward suddenly as if to come to her, and then drew back. She saw it all now.

"Camiola, my love, you will forgive me? You will forgive me for having found out this in such a way? You will remember how much depended on it for you and for me? If ever the means could justify the end they are justified for us in this. Think what our lives would have been if we had not known that we loved each other until it was all too late! Now it is not too late. Camiola, my love, speak to me."

Camiola had been standing mute and motionless as a statue while he spoke. There was silence yet for one moment, of unutterable pain to him, for he guessed the worst now.

"And you played that trick on me?" she said at last, in a voice of unnatural composure and coldness; "you stooped to play that trick, that unworthy trick, to get at a poor girl's secret? You disguised yourself to play

the spy on me, although you knew that I was engaged to Georgie Lisle! You a man—a gentleman! Well, well, I think all the better of *him; he* would not have done that!"

"I love you," Romont said passionately; "I had a right to know whether you loved me or not. If I had found that you didn't, you would have had no trouble from me; I would never have come to obtrude my love on you. What matter how I came to guess, or to think, or to hope that you loved me? I did think that by making up as Joseph, the Albanian, I had a chance of finding out for certain whether you loved me or not. Was I to allow any scruple of that kind to keep me from knowing that? You can't marry Georgie Lisle—you shan't marry him. I love you, and you love me; and you belong to me, and you shall marry me. But I want you to forgive me first; I do, indeed, Camiola, Camiola." He entreated her in beseeching tones with tender repetition of her name.

"Good-bye," she said, turning away.

"For to-night?"

"For ever."

"But you can't mean that; you can't be serious. I haven't committed a crime."

"It seems to me very like a crime; a treachery, or a treason. I wonder was ever a poor girl so played upon before?"

"Oh, but this is folly, sheer folly," he said impatiently. "The one thing is that I love you. I fell in love with you the very first day I saw you; and now I have found out that you love me. For us two the rest is nothing."

"The rest is a great deal for me," she said sadly.

"Still you *do* love me?"

"I don't believe I do now—after that," she said. "At least, I will get over it. I will teach myself not to love—any—any one who could have played such a part as that. Oh, Mr. Romont," and the tears rushed to her eyes, "you were my hero and my ideal—my idol; and now you are not so any more. Oh! why did you do this?"

She put her hands over her eyes. He

thought she was softened; he put his arm round her waist. She drew away.

"You will forgive me?" he said tenderly, imploringly, "after a little time, and when you come to think all this over? Your heart and your love will excuse me and plead for me. I'll spare you any more talk to-night; and I'll bring Mr. Lisle in the morning, and we'll save poor Janette. Good night."

She uncovered her face.

"Before you go," she said, "I ought to tell you what I mean to do. I will tell Georgie Lisle all this; he has a right to know. I will tell him that I was foolish enough to make a hero of you and—and—and, to—well, yes, to love you, and that you found it out, and know all about it. I'll not tell him how, if you don't like. I'll tell him, too, that I like him now better than I did before, and if he still wishes to marry me—well, he may. I will be his wife."

"Of course he will say yes," Romont said fiercely. "He knew quite well that you didn't love him; he knew it all along. He knew that you were only talked and pestered into

engaging yourself to him—and what did he care so long as he could hold you to your promise? This makes no difference to *him*. What will it matter his knowing the name of the man you love? He knew there was some such man all the time. Camiola, you shall never marry him."

"If he will have me," she said, "I will marry him. Good-bye, Mr. Romont; it is all over. I thought you were so different! It seems to me as if I had lost you altogether now."

"Do you really think my offence is unpardonable? Is there to be no excuse and no forgiveness?"

"It isn't about the offence being unpardonable," she replied, with a wan smile; "but about the man not being the same, not being what one thought him. If I was in love it was with the Bertie Romont of my imagination, and not with you. That's all; and now, good night."

Love, anger, wild hope, cruel disappointment, were surging and raging in the young man's heart. She looked so lovely, so

queenly, in her cold unpitying mood under the mocking and merciless lustre of the stars, he could not restrain his passion; he seized her in his strong, well-trained arms, and held her head down and kissed her lips again and again.

"There," he said, releasing her, "I seal our engagement with these kisses, and bind you to be my wife! Go and talk of marrying Georgie Lisle after that!"

He rushed from the rectory back to Fitzurse House. His heart seemed bursting; but not from unhappiness. No; he even felt a certain wild elation. He did not give much heed to Camiola's parting words. "She loves me; she is mine; she will never marry him"—this was what he kept telling himself as he hurried along. He had to put restraint upon himself lest he should shout aloud in his excitement and astonish belated wayfarers.

The evening had been one of excitement so far, and there was more excitement to come of a kind he little expected. He was determined to go and see Mrs. Pollen at

once—that very night. The hour was late for Fitzurseham, but it was not late for the West End and Mrs. Pollen. He wanted to tell her of the result of their conspiracy so far; no doubt he wanted to be comforted and kept in heart by her, and he wanted also to consult her about Walter Fitzurse and Janette. But he could not go to see her at that hour of night as Albert Romont; he must become Albanian Joseph again for that night only. Mrs. Pollen's servant returning late to Mrs. Pollen's hotel, would excite the surprise of nobody. He always kept his Albanian make-up and the dye for his complexion ready at Fitzurse House. In a remarkably short space of time he was Joseph the Albanian again.

He could not find Pilgrim anywhere, and he wanted to speak to him before leaving. In the course of his quest he entered the music-room, where one faint light was burning. He observed that Mrs. Pollen's little casket of money was standing on one of the tables. He took it up half unconsciously; it was very heavy. He could not help

thinking what a chance was here for any Fitzurseham thief or burglar if such person could only guess that the casket was made heavy by the weight of gold coin. To be sure, the thief or burglar would not be the possessor of one of Mrs. Pollen's keys, but he could manage to get the box open and become master of its secret and his treasure for all that. Strange that at such a moment and with such troubles of his own, Romont should think of all this; and yet he did find himself thinking that Mrs. Pollen was very incautious; that Fitzurse House was almost absolutely unprotected; that common report already described it as full of untold treasures; and that a midnight invasion of it was one of the likeliest things in such a region. He resolved to talk to Mrs. Pollen about that too. "If she will leave money and costly things here, she must have two or three men to sleep in the house."

Suddenly he heard a quiet and stealthy step on the gravel walk outside the music-room wall. Could it be Pilgrim coming back? No; the tread was too light; it was

the tread of a young man, and at the same time it was too cautious and too creeping. Romont stood near the great curtain of pearl-grey plush which hung across the little door opening on the lawn, the little secret door for Mrs. Pollen and her particular friends, and for which each of the friends had a latch-key. He stood there and listened, and at the same time quietly felt for the revolver which he carried with him when he had on his Albanian dress. The step came glidingly up to the door. There was a pause; the person outside was apparently listening. Only one man, Romont thought; it can't be much of a put-up thing, anyhow. Now, to his surprise, he heard a key put into the lock. It was, then, some one of Mrs. Pollen's particular friends coming to visit her house at that hour? Curious that, surely.

There was not much time for consideration. Romont drew back from the curtain. He stood at the table on which the casket was placed. The door was opened, and was carefully, quietly locked again; the heavy plush curtain was cautiously lifted, and

Walter Fitzurse came into the room. The light was so faint that he had come close up to where Romont stood without seeing him. When he did see him he started back.

"Joseph!" he exclaimed.

"Signor," Joseph replied, standing in his usual statuesque quietness, with unmoved, unsurprised face. Then Walter began to explain in the most clear and elementary French he could summon up, suiting it as best he could to the level of Joseph's capacity for understanding foreign tongues, that he had come there to get a piece of music which Mrs. Pollen had promised him, and to write her a letter. He made signs illustrative of the movements of a person writing, to help Joseph further to a comprehension of his meaning. At last Joseph signified that he understood, and put pen, ink, and paper at Walter's disposal, making the light in that part of the room much stronger at the same time. Then he bowed respectfully, and silently left the room, and Walter was alone there.

CHAPTER XXI.

A SUDDEN INTERRUPTION.

WHY had Walter Fitzurse come like a thief in the night to visit Fitzurse House?

He had really come upon a desperate errand. He had made all his arrangements to run away with Janette next morning or that night; he had his plans for their secret but safe marriage perfectly adjusted, and he had spent his last sovereign in completing them. Money he must have this night, get it how he would; and he had gone to Mrs. Pollen and asked her to lend him—he put it gracefully as a matter of loan—to lend him some money, and she had peremptorily refused him. She spoke to him in words of remonstrance, of generous anger, of reproach; but she would not give him the

money except on conditions which he scornfully refused to accept. So he left her, in ungrateful anger and impatience. He tried to find Romont and could not; tried to get hold of this or that friend, but every one was out of town somewhere that summer Sunday, and there were few of his recent companions in any case who would lend any money to him or any one. Then, driven almost to despair, he remembered Mrs. Pollen's casket of gold coin to which he had a key, the key that also opened the particular door of the music-room. Why not take that money, and repay it after the marriage? Once he was safely married to Janette Lisle her people must do something for him; Mrs. Pollen herself, who now owned herself a connection of his through her late husband, must do something for him.

If Fitzurse had only trusted Mrs. Pollen, and confided in her from the beginning, no one can say what might not have happened. If he had come to her and told her that he loved Janette, and that Janette loved him, she would have given him money enough

to begin married life with, and she would have made herself his ambassadress to the Lisles to ask for the hand of their daughter. Even if he had convinced her that such an embassy would be futile, and that rather than lose Janette he was determined to run away with her, and had appealed to Mrs. Pollen's generosity and sentiment to aid him in his Lochinvar enterprise, it is only too likely that Mrs. Pollen's delight in romantic emotion and in daring effort would have gained her over to his side. But Walter was one of those unlucky persons who are described as too clever by half. He trusted nothing to Mrs. Pollen, and thus it happened that his two love stories came upon her at the one moment, and she knew that he had cast off poor Vinnie Lammas, and that he was endeavouring to induce Janette Lisle to leave her father's house. This was too much for her.

"My experiment has been a dead failure *there*," she said. "He is a cad, and that's all about *that*. I'll put Lady Letitia on her guard. No; I had better see him first and

talk to him. Perhaps I can work upon his fears, and in that way get him to let Janette Lisle alone. Dear little girl! I like her all the better for her rubbish about equality, and her romance. But she must not be sacrificed to him. I must intervene. It is about time some one intervened, it would appear."

The intervention thus far had taken only the form of a strong remonstrance from Mrs. Pollen to Fitzurse. Camiola had once heard some of it, more than she was quite able to understand at the time. Mrs. Pollen had found out through the inquiries she had been making that Walter Fitzurse was not in any sense a member of the great Fitzurse family; and she had insisted on his making this known to Janette Lisle. Walter had promised that he would do this; not particularly clear as to his purpose to keep the promise, but quite satisfied that he could tell anything to Janette without endangering his hold on her affections. If he had to tell her anything it would be easy for him to say that he had only just made the sad discovery that he did not belong to the great family, and that the

moment he discovered this he felt it his duty to tell her and to set her free of her engagement with him. He knew very well what would come of this ; Janette would simply declare that she loved him better than ever. He knew well that he held a sure place in her heart no matter what family he belonged to. It was not clear to him that he had not made a mistake so far as she was concerned in not giving himself out at first as one of the picturesque race of the *proletaire.*

He left Mrs. Pollen's on this memorable Sunday in desperate mood—mood to risk anything. But he was by no means unhappy or even ill-satisfied ; indeed, he was very proud of himself and of the part he was playing. He considered himself a highly interesting person. He was glad to think that Camiola now knew all about him ; it greatly enhanced his self-satisfaction to think that this rich and beautiful girl was compelled to be in his confidence, and was positively afraid of him because of her friend. Meanwhile he had been living for some time in very good style, as he considered it, in London. He had got

to know a few men of some position in society; some of them a little fast, but he did not mind about that. His name had been put up at one or two clubs; he was beginning to be well known to a certain circle in the West End. He was essentially a flexible plastic creature, and he took to this sort of thing as easily as if he had been used to it all his life. Perhaps if a profoundly sagacious social philosopher had been asked what was the principal secret of Walter's success in society, such society as it was, the answer might have been that it was to be found in his Heaven-bestowed gift of wearing good clothes well. It seemed to be obvious that a man on whom well-cut clothes looked so well must be a gentleman, and a sort of man to put up at one's club.

But a crisis in his fortunes had now come this Sunday, and it must be boldly met. He must get money, and he must get off with Janette Lisle and marry her. The money was to be had in Mrs. Pollen's casket; he would borrow it, and put it back after it had served his turn. At the worst,

his taking it could be boldly acknowledged as a lover's stratagem when once he was married to Janette, and nothing would come of it. He made his way to Fitzurseham. He passed by the place where he had lodged; he passed under the windows of Mrs. Lammas's house, and saw that all was dark there. Vinnie, no doubt, was in bed long since. Was she thinking of him, he wondered? Very likely not; probably she had fallen in love with some one else. He hoped so—poor little thing! Strange that he could ever have fancied himself in love with her. She was looking limp and shabby, he thought, when he saw her at church that day. It was a great relief that all that silly old love affair between him and her was over. He would tell Janette about it some day, and Janette would be very kind to the little girl.

He found himself at Fitzurse House. He went up to the front door and rang the bell. He meant to ask for Pilgrim. Pilgrim evidently was not at home. No one answered to the summons of the bell. That was all

right. It was part of Walter's plan to go to the door and ask for Pilgrim in case any one should be in. He went away, but did not leave the grounds. He hung about for a while in one of the shrubberies, then crept to the door of the music-room and softly let himself in and closed the door behind him. He expected to find himself quite alone. The ordinary servants had no admission to that room unless when the door opening on the corridor was expressly unlocked to admit one of them. Walter went in, and was making promptly for the table on which stood the casket when he suddenly became aware of the presence of silent Joseph, the Albanian servant. This was indeed a surprise. Who could have counted on seeing him in that room at such a time? Fitzurse fell back at first and was inclined to give up his enterprise and escape from the place as quickly as possible. But it suddenly occurred to him that the destiny which he always believed to have made him its special charge had his interests still in its view when it sent the Albanian in his way. Who should

say that it was not the Albanian who had taken the money, supposing its having been taken should be discovered; supposing Fitzurse himself should not be able to replace it before any discovery was made? To turn the opportunity to the best account Fitzurse must openly meet Joseph and speak with him. Then, if any unlucky chance should lead to premature discovery, Fitzurse could say that he had himself seen Joseph in the house and spoken with him on the very night. It would not be the act of the scion of a noble family, perhaps—he still insisted on being a Fitzurse to himself, let Mrs. Pollen say what she might—thus to allow a false accusation to prevail against a poor innocent foreign servant; but affairs were well-nigh desperate with him, and he could not stop for scruples. Of course it never should come to that, he thought. He would take care to replace the money in good time; but at the worst it was better a wretched Albanian should suffer disgrace than that the life-project of a Fitzurse should come to grief. After all, was it not extremely

probable that the Albanian had no particularly good purpose in prowling about the music-room at that hour of the night?

So he got rid of Joseph, as we have seen. He did not venture to lock the corridor entrance behind the Albanian, and so shut him out. This, he thought, might look suspicious just then, although it was always done by Mrs. Pollen and her few initiated friends; for the charm of the music-room was that it was supposed to be cut off from all but the initiated, unless when the initiated chose, for any momentary purpose, to admit the uninitiated. But as Joseph had got in somehow, Walter thought it would not be safe to shut him out. He sat down, in the first instance, and wrote a letter to Mrs. Pollen, which he sealed and left for her; he would do everything as he said he was going to do it: and then, and then—he noiselessly opened the casket. He saw the money, and he stayed his hand a moment. It was not robbery he was bent on? No, surely not; his forehead grew hot at the idea. But it might come to look like it; it

might be mistaken for such an act. Cold drops stood on his temples, his hands trembled, but he could not draw back. If he failed to get money by some means that night, all would be lost for him. He took two rouleaux of sovereigns out of the casket and thrust them into his pocket. Then he quietly locked the casket again. For good or ill the deed was done now.

He was about to ring for Joseph and call his attention to the letter for Mrs. Pollen, when he heard a key turn in the private door, and in a moment the door was opened. On the table near the casket a revolver was lying. It was Romont's revolver; he had left it carelessly there when he found that he had to deal with Walter Fitzurse only, and not with the Fitzurseham burglar. Fitzurse caught it up instinctively, and stood as if on his defence.

CHAPTER XXII.

STOOPING TO CONQUER.

"HULLO, Fitzurse! who could have expected to see you here at such a time as this? How are you?"

Fitzurse started and trembled; positively trembled, and felt his forehead bedewed with perspiration. There was Romont standing before him—Romont, whom he had believed to be far away; and if Romont had been one minute, half a minute, in the room, he must have seen what Fitzurse was doing. Romont was in walking dress, and carried his hat in his hand. He looked as if he had just come in. That was something of a relief to Walter's mind. So far as he knew there was not another human creature in the house but himself and Joseph.

"Why, Romont? I did not know that you were in London. I never thought of seeing you here to-night." He put down the revolver. Romont observed the action.

"No, I don't suppose you did, and I never thought of seeing you here. I am always rushing about, backwards and forwards. Did you come to see Pilgrim, or Joseph, perhaps?"

"I came—yes, I came to see Pilgrim. I have something to say to him. I have been writing a letter to Mrs. Pollen."

"You didn't expect to see Joseph here, did you?"

"No, I didn't; I thought he was in town with Mrs. Pollen. Very odd, our all turning up in this way," Fitzurse said, with a desperate attempt at a laugh.

"Very odd; about the oddest thing I have known for a long time. I will tell you what I came for, Fitzurse, my good fellow; there's no mystery about it. I came to look after some money in this very room."

"Some money in this very room!" Fitzurse felt as if his heart was standing still.

His throat was parched, his lips were dry. Could it be that he was found out; found out before he had time to make any profit by his deed? "Some money in this very room?" he gasped. "What do you mean, Romont? Is there any money of yours in this room?"

"No, not of mine; but of Mrs. Pollen's. She is very unwise in leaving money about in that sort of way. She told me that she had left it here in this thing; and I could not rest until I had gone to see that it was all right. I don't think money ought to be left about in that sort of way. It may be a temptation to some poor devil who otherwise might continue to be an honest man to the end of his life. I suppose it is temptation or no temptation that often makes all the difference between the honest man and the thief."

"I suppose so—I dare say. By the way, I wonder, Romont, what this Albanian fellow was doing in this room? Did Mrs. Pollen know that he was coming here? Did she send him for anything?"

"Why; what about Joseph?"

"Well, somehow I thought his manner was rather odd when I saw him here and spoke to him. He didn't seem to make it quite clear what he was doing."

"Oh, he didn't seem to make it quite clear what he was doing here, didn't he?"

"No; and he was in this room—this very room."

"Where you are now?" Romont said with emphasis.

"Where you and I are now, yes. Doesn't that seem rather odd? What could he have wanted here?"

"Do you mean to say, Fitzurse, that you suspect Joseph of being after this money that Mrs. Pollen left here?"

"Well, I don't know anything about him; he may be a very honest man for all I can tell; but still——"

"Exactly: 'what sall de honest man do in my closet?' What is the honest man doing in Mrs. Pollen's music-room, where the money is? But you see, Fitzurse, that would apply to you and me, wouldn't it?"

"I suppose there is some difference be-

tween you and me and a rascally Albanian servant."

"There is some difference, certainly," Romont said with slow deliberateness, "between Joseph and you; a very considerable difference. Between Joseph and me—well, I am not quite so sure as to that."

For the life of him Walter could not yet tell whether Romont did or did not suspect him. He was becoming desperate. He had a weapon near him; it was coming into his mind that he would have to use it. Better anything, any danger, any crime of blood, than to be found out in what he was doing. Even as the thought came up wildly, savagely, in his mind, he felt that Romont's eye was following his every motion. While he was thinking of the revolver his hand had unconsciously moved towards it, and he saw Romont watching him; he could see even a faint smile of scorn on Romont's face.

At that moment Fitzurse felt himself a murderer in his heart. He was equal to murder now; things had gone with him at such a rush, with such a terrible descent.

Better anything than be found out in what he had been doing. Better, a thousand times better, that Janette should believe him guilty of slaying than guilty of robbery. Suppose he were to kill Romont then and there, it would be easy to invent some story of a quarrel and an assault which, if it would not save him from the law, would save him from utter shame, and would still leave it in the power of Janette not to despise him. To do the unhappy creature justice, he was only thinking now of what Janette would say. All hope for himself was gone for the moment. The look with which Romont followed the motion of his right hand was a revelation to him. Romont knew all about his doings, and knew the very thought of murder that was in his mind. If he could kill Romont and put back the money in its place before Joseph returned—then let Fate do what she would, the worst would not be known; and Janette would not be utterly ashamed of him. The level floor seemed to rock and dance underneath him; there were strange noises whirring in his ears like the

throbbing of machinery in movement; he must do something or faint. If he were to faint all would be lost. One moment and he would have played his card of despair; but he was interrupted by Romont's voice, which uttered, with the most perfect composure, the words—

"It's no use, Fitzurse; Joseph is outside. Don't you remember that? And besides, your hand is shaking; you couldn't hit a haystack. I should feel perfectly safe standing here, provided only that you promised to aim at me."

"What the devil do you mean?" Fitzurse asked fiercely. He took away his hand from the weapon which it was touching. He must brazen the thing out now. His courage and reason were coming back.

"Never mind what I mean; we understand each other. You are not used to this sort of thing, Fitzurse; your impulse was absurd. Well, you talked of Joseph; you seemed to suspect Joseph of being after this money. Now if you will just wait here a moment I'll see that Joseph does not leave the house,

and then we'll search Mrs. Pollen's casket. I know exactly how much money was there. If a coin be missing we'll talk to Joseph about it. I'll leave you here just for a moment or two. You understand me, Fitzurse?" Romont spoke with a stern emphasis.

Yes, Fitzurse understood only too well. A last chance was given him. He was in Romont's power, and Romont knew all; but Romont would not betray him. He made good use of his moment alone. He put the money back and closed the casket once again. Romont returned a few seconds after the restoration had been accomplished.

"Joseph is all right," he said. "I am sure you must have wronged him, Fitzurse; he doesn't seem in the slightest degree confused or put out. I dare say we shall find everything just as it ought to be. This is Mrs. Pollen's little money-box; the money ought to be here. Why, yes, there it is, of course—six little rouleaux, safe as can be. Poor Joseph! I am sure, Fitzurse, you are glad to see that the money is all right, and

that there is no charge to be made against poor Joseph. You are glad of that?"

"Of course I am glad," Fitzurse said sullenly. "Well, I must be going."

"You will wait for Pilgrim, will you not?"

"No, I think not. It's getting late; and it does not much matter whether I see him to-night or not."

"Fitzurse," Romont said, coming up close to him and taking him by the arm, "we understand each other, don't we? I know perfectly well what you came here to do, and you know that I know it. I am giving you a chance; will you go away?"

Fitzurse flung himself free of Romont's hold.

"Away! where?"

"Well, anywhere out of England; America or Australia. A new country is a new career. Begin your life over again, and begin it on a better plan. So far as I am concerned, nobody shall ever know anything of this night's events. Will you promise to go?"

"I have no money. You know that well enough."

"You shall have money. You can take this money here to begin with. Nobody knows it is here but you and I——"

"And Mrs. Pollen?"

"I shall satisfy Mrs. Pollen without letting her know anything that we don't want her to know."

"There's Joseph," Fitzurse said doggedly. "*He* knows."

"Oh, Joseph—never mind Joseph. What I don't tell Joseph won't tell, I can promise you. Look here, Fitzurse, I wish to save you—I do indeed; and you are on the very edge of ruin. Pull yourself together; drop all this confounded nonsense about the Fitzurse family; call yourself by your own name—your father's name; go into a new country, and redeem yourself—and above all let that poor girl alone."

"What poor girl?"

"Janette Lisle. You couldn't surely think of allowing her to marry you now?"

Fitzurse thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and looked Romont for the first time straight in the face.

"I tell you what, Mr. Romont, this is going a little too far. Because you take it into your head to fancy something or other about me—which may be mere imagination or invention, or I don't care what—you presume to go on as if you were my master, and I your slave. I'll not stand being ordered about by you; I'll not be bullied by you. I can manage my own affairs."

"Do you really mean to say that you would make that young lady your wife, after what has happened?"

"If I go to America, or Australia, or anywhere else, I shall take her with me as my wife."

"Before you leave this place," Romont said, "you must promise me to give up Miss Lisle, or I will go at once to her father and her brother and denounce you as a thief. No, you shan't get out of this just yet." Romont turned to lock the door. Fitzurse had become half mad with rage and shame and fear—fear of exposure. He was reminded of the last desperate chance again. He clutched the revolver and fired a shot

at Romont, whose back was turned to him. But it was as Romont had said, his hand was trembling, his aim was all abroad, the bullet went into the door twelve good inches away from its mark. Fitzurse was a good shot at a shooting-match, but he had had no practice of shots fired in anger. Before he could fire again Romont literally flung himself on his assailant and seized his right hand. Romont was much stronger, especially in the wrists and arms. He was always quite cool and collected, his physical resources as well as his mental were always at call. The very suddenness of his dash at Fitzurse was the result of instant calculation and not mere instinct or impulse. Fitzurse felt the revolver torn from his hand with such a sudden wrench that it seemed to him as if his wrist and every one of his fingers must have been dislocated by the strain. Then Romont flung him away, and he staggered back against the wall. He recovered himself and looked wildly round the room for any manner of weapon. Romont understood him.

"No use now," Romont coolly said. "You

are covered by the revolver, don't you see? I have been out West a good deal, and I am used to this sort of thing. For you, Fitzurse —or whatever your name is—I must say that you don't seem any better hand at murder than you are at robbery."

Fitzurse flung himself down into a chair and covered his face with his hands.

"You can do as you like," he said, without looking up. "Shoot me if you will, I don't care—now." And the unfortunate young man, whom the rapid and hideous descent of a few short hours had brought so deep down into unforeseen crime, burst into mere hysterical weeping. Suddenly he looked up, and with a face distorted by tears and agony, he said in a choking voice—

"I'll do anything; I'll promise anything—if only—if only you won't tell Miss Lisle?"

Romont put the revolver carelessly on a table. He knew there was no further need to be on his guard against Fitzurse. He quite understood now the man he had to deal with. Fitzurse was only the half-insane victim of his own vanity and ambition; he

was neither a deliberate thief nor a determined bravo.

"I give you my word of honour, I swear to you, Fitzurse, that I will never tell any human being of anything that has happened here between us, if only you will promise to give up that girl. I am just as willing and just as anxious to save you as I was before, and I don't believe that you are wholly lost; no, not a bit of it. I will be your friend even yet, if you will allow me. You will let that girl alone?"

"What can I say to her? How can I get out of it? She likes me; she is fond of me; she is indeed. What shall I say to her? We were to have gone off together to-night or to-morrow morning."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Romont, "I have been only just in time."

"Giving her up I give up everything; what do I care about my life any more? No; I can't give her up—I won't give her up."

"My good fellow, don't you see that you must give her up?—don't you see that after

what has happened I must interfere and tell her father and her brother if you don't promise me? I shall have to call in Pilgrim and Joseph—yes, and Joseph; and to send for the police and give you into custody on a charge of attempted robbery and murder. Joseph saw you take out the gold; he was watching you all the time. I know how you put it back; and I saw you attempt the murder. You will spend this evening in prison, and will probably only come out of prison to go into penal servitude. These are the hard realities of your position. You must see that Miss Lisle is not likely to marry a convicted felon. That is one side of the case. Now look at the other. I offer you freedom, my absolute silence about all this, and a full chance to you to redeem yourself and start a new and honourable career in some other country. You shall have money and every fair chance. I don't suppose a strict moralist would approve of what I am doing; but I don't mind. I think that with all your vanity and your nonsense you have some good in you still, and, moralist or no moralist, I give

you another chance. Will you take it? Come."

"What can I say to her? What shall I say to her?" the wretched young man feebly moaned.

"Well, you can say something like this—you can say that you know now her father and mother would never approve of the marriage, and you can say that you have found that you have not as much money or as good prospects as you expected, and that you do not think it right to her to drag her into poverty, and exile, and a quarrel with her family all at once; and that out of your very love for her—for I take it for granted, Fitzurse, that you *do* love her; you are not bad enough to have been merely deceiving her?—out of your very love for her you think it better to go away and leave her. Write something like that, and she will understand it in the right way, and think all the more of you. Then she will remember you always in a kindly sort of way, and you will always be a hero to her—even when she has married some one whom her father and mother like,

and is happy. By Heaven, Fitzurse, if I were you that is what I should do, and I should be glad to have spared the girl from misery, and saved up for myself a kindly memory in her heart for ever."

"I suppose you are right," Fitzurse said sullenly. "At all events, you are in a position to dictate terms, and I have put myself into a position which gives you the right to dictate them. There is only one way out for me, and that is through the door you offer to open. I ought to thank you, Romont; and I do see that you have acted very generously, and I shall be better able to feel in the right way by-and-by perhaps; but you have knocked down my castle of cards with a pretty rough hand. You have spoilt my game just as I was on the very point of winning it, and I am afraid I can't be quite as grateful as I ought to be for your generosity in letting me off—just yet."

"I don't mind," said Romont; "I am doing my best. I am thinking more about the girl than about you. You accept my terms—that is the main point?"

"I must; I have no choice. It's a little hard on me, isn't it—that a man should lose love and ambition and everything—even London—all at once, and have to be grateful for it too?"

"I don't ask you to be grateful," Romont said sternly; "and I don't see much opening for ambition in the way you were going, and I am not quite certain whether you were in love with Janette Lisle or only with yourself. But I am glad you have made up your mind."

"One word more," Fitzurse said hastily, as he saw that Romont was about to bring the dialogue to an end. "You won't do things by halves—I believe that much of you. For the few days that I shall have to prepare for going away, wherever I am to go, you will not seem to have cut me? You will not keep away from me? That would make people suspect."

"I will behave," said Romont, "exactly as if you were my closest friend. I will help you in all your preparations; I will see you off; I will be among the last to shake your hand and wish you good luck as you go."

For a moment Fitzurse was really touched. Through the sevenfold hide of vanity and selfish egotism and mean ambition, shallow artifice and small cynicism, the simple manhood of Romont's nature pierced his heart. "If I were to begin again," he thought, "I should like—I should try—to be like that. Well, I am to begin again; I am to have another chance."

"Shall we wait for Pilgrim?" Romont suddenly said. "He is sure to be here in good time. We can tell him that you are going away. He may have some advice to give us. He knows a lot of things, Pilgrim does."

"No, I don't want to see Pilgrim," Walter said hastily. "I don't want Pilgrim to have anything to do with my affairs."

"We wouldn't tell him anything except just that you were determined to go abroad somewhere."

"I don't want Pilgrim," Walter repeated. He was afraid that Pilgrim would bring up the story of Vinnie Lammas, which Walter was not anxious to be reminded of just then. He little appreciated the chivalrous forbear-

ance of Pilgrim. Even to Romont Pilgrim had not told Vinnie's story except in the most rapid outline, and he had made no charge against Fitzurse other than the statement that he was not lately so fond of the girl as she was of him. What Pilgrim did not know of his own knowledge he never would tell as a fact.

Romont agreed that Pilgrim should not be taken into confidence. He understood the compact with Fitzurse to be complete, and that was what he was anxious about. There was no further talk of writing or signing anything. Walter left Fitzurse House at midnight, having with him more of the gold than he had himself taken out of Mrs. Pollen's treasure casket in the first instance, and having given Romont his promise to meet him at five o'clock the following afternoon at Romont's lodgings.

Fitzurse passed out of the music-room into the night. He turned for a moment and looked back upon the house he was leaving. He must have felt humbled and crushed if he had ever allowed genuine feeling to live in

his heart at all. But he never had done this; he had made his life a piece of acting even to himself. As he looked back on the old hall he was not an impostor with a false name, going out disgraced into exile, pledged as the sole condition of his safety to give up the girl who loved him. No; he felt himself a hero of romance, the last of the proud race of Fitzurse—driven, indeed, by overmastering destiny from the home of his ancestors, but still intrepid and self-sustained, still resolute to strive against fate—a very Fitzurse to the end. Perhaps no writer of fiction has had the courage yet to sound fully the deeps of self-deception and self-delusion which are to be found in certain egotistic natures.

Walter left the house, then, not crushed and humbled, but, on the contrary, rather elate and full of new purpose. There was a possibility occurring to him which had not been thought of, certainly had not been talked of, when he made his compact with Romont. Suppose Janette Lisle should refuse to take advantage of his self-sacrifice? Suppose she should declare that she preferred

his love to any other earthly consideration? Suppose she would not take back her freedom? Suppose she were to insist on becoming his wife? What was he to do then? Could his compact with Romont hold under such conditions? Could any man be expected to insist upon renouncing the hand of the girl he loved, and who loved him, if she, resolved not to be outdone in generosity and affection, were to declare that she would not be renounced? There was something comforting, something hopeful, in these thoughts. Suppose Janette Lisle did then insist on being his wife, with what splendid *éclat* would they not go out to America together—the young hero who had carried off the British earl's granddaughter! In anticipation he saw the delighted society of the new world flinging open its gorgeous saloons to welcome him and his bride. The tempting thought came in his mind, "If this should happen, if Janette will not give me up, I have the money; destiny itself has placed it in my hands through the hands of my enemy. We can get away.

When Christian Pilgrim came back from his purposeless wanderings he found Romont standing on the lawn near the outer door of the music-room, smoking a cigar. There was a certain look of exaltation, if not even exultation, on Romont's face, and when he spoke he spoke like a man in high spirits. Pilgrim was surprised to see him still there; but it was generally understood that no one was to be much surprised at any of the goings and comings of the principal frequenters of Fitzurse House. Romont had a letter in his hand.

"Look here, Pilgrim," he said, "my brave companion in Humane Society competition, I particularly want this letter taken up to the rectory at once. I would take it myself but for reasons."

"I'll take it, of course, Mr. Romont. For Mr. Lisle?"

"No; for Miss Sabine."

Pilgrim drew back a little.

"You don't want me to see her?" he asked.

"No, not necessary. But I want it to be

quite certain that she gets the letter to-night. She won't have gone to bed yet, I should think; but if she has you can have it given to her maid or some one, and make it clear that Miss Sabine is to get it at once. She must read it to-night. I'll wait until you come back; I want to have some talk with you."

Pilgrim took the letter and went his way. He felt sure it was a love-letter from Romont to Miss Sabine. "Why not?" he asked himself. "Who could help loving her? who could be a fitter lover for her?"

This, however, was all the letter contained:—

"Don't expect Mr. Lisle in the morning; I have not seen him or sent him any message. There is no necessity now. I am sure it is all right. Don't say anything to her; she is quite safe now."

Romont did not say a word about his love. It would have been unworthy, he thought, to take such advantage of a letter which was to tell her that he had succeeded in saving her friend. He wanted her love, but did not

want to have any ray of it merely refracted from her sudden gratitude. "She does love me," he thought. "I can wait."

Pilgrim came back and told him he had given the letter to a servant. Miss Sabine was still up and would get it.

"I saw Walter Fitzurse in the grounds," he said.

"In the grounds here?"

"No; up at the rectory. He didn't see me, I think—he didn't want to see me, perhaps—but I saw him; he was behind one of the trees. Perhaps he wanted to know something about Vinnie."

"I shouldn't think it was that," said Romont. "I don't suppose he knows anything about what happened."

"I hope not; I shouldn't like him to know; it would only make him more vain than he is. He would take a pleasure in the thought that a pretty girl had tried to drown herself on that account."

"He isn't thinking about her now, I am sure," Romont said.

"He was there, anyhow."

Romont remained silent a moment, a little anxious. Then his looks cleared.

"I know—I see. Poor fellow, he has gone to take a last look; that is what I should do if I were he. In that way I am in thorough sympathy with the goings on of the ghosts, Pilgrim. I should make a first-class ghost; I should like to be always haunting the places where I had felt anything, happiness or not. Walter Fitzurse is doing the ghost business to-night." In his heart Romont felt compassion for the fallen and ruined young man, and thought the better of him because he had stolen away to haunt the spot where his lost love was hidden. A pang of generous pity went through him.

He told Pilgrim nothing about Walter. After an hour or two of talk Romont started to walk home alone. After all the excitement of the day a long lonely walk would suit him. Faint streaks of dawn kept showing in the sky as he passed the Old Ferry Inn. There was an unwonted air of life and activity in the house for such an hour; there were lights moving about in the rooms here

and there. In the river just in front of the hostelry a small steam yacht was lying. Her steam was up, and she was evidently about to start. A boat was made fast to the steps of the old inn. Romont stopped for a moment and looked at the steamer, and wondered who owned her, and what she was going to do; then glanced at the water, thought of the poor girl he had rescued from it only a few hours ago, and went his way.

He reached his home tired, proud, and on the whole happy in the thought that he had been able to do something which Camiola would be glad to hear of; and he slept well and had sweet dreams.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LETTER FROM YON POOR GIRL.

THE quiet sunshine made even the dreariest parts of Fitzurseham look glad on the morning after poor Vinnie's distracted plunge and fortunate, well-planned rescue. The waves that lapped the shore, now bare for a long stretch under the churchyard wall, seemed too gentle and too sunny to have harm in them for any human creature. The very chimneys of the rectory seemed asleep, like the houses in Wordsworth's exquisite poem. Yet there had been some sleepless eyes in the rectory that night. There were some of the inmates of the place who had not gone to bed; and some who, when they did go to bed, were not able to find much sleep there. Mrs. Lammas had not gone to bed at all;

she had remained up to see after Vinnie and spare any other person the trouble of seeing after her. Two other of the ordinary inmates of the place had not gone to bed any more than Mrs. Lammas, but for different reasons. Camiola had gone to bed, but had not succeeded in getting much sleep. The capacity, however, of some girls for doing without sleep is a marvel never to be wondered at enough by mere men, and Camiola was up in the morning as fresh as if she had been enjoying hours upon hours of unbroken slumber.

One of those whom the rectory now sheltered had at least slept well herself, although the cause of sleeplessness to at least one other. The heroine of last night's little tragi-comedy woke about ten o'clock. Vinnie Lammas's first sensation when she opened her eyes was one of exquisite refreshment, the consciousness of relief and rest. She had been well cared for, and, wearied out by excitement and sheer physical exhaustion, had slept for hours and hours. She allowed her still sleepy eyes to wander languidly

with a vague curiosity around the large and handsome room, and was dimly conscious of a feeling of pleasure at finding herself in a sleeping chamber so different from that which she was in the habit of occupying. The handsome furniture, the cornices, the curtains, the book-shelves, and the pictures—fancy, real pictures in a bedroom!—were objects of languid admiration and slowly unfolding interest. The sight, however, of these unfamiliar objects brought her before long to the recollection of the reasons why she found herself among them; and then suddenly Vinnie turned shame-stricken in her bed, and buried her face in the bedclothes. Oh! now she remembered it all. She saw herself again standing on the wall of the churchyard, heard once more the cry that came from her lips, and felt all the horror of that wild plunge and the fall which seemed to her to be down from the very sky. She felt the water giving way beneath her plunging feet that strained instinctively, vainly, for a foothold, and she seemed to be sinking down, down, down,—and what happened

after that for a long time she did not know.

The sensation that now she felt most strongly was one of mere shame. She had been taken out of the water by somebody and brought here to the rectory—and oh! what a scandal and what a talk. And who had found her, and how was she brought here? Of course it must have been a man, or men, who had pulled her out of the water —and she hardly dared to think of the humiliation of the whole event, with all its possible conditions. To be dragged out of the river with her clothes all soaking rags about her, and brought here to this strange grand house by strange men; how shocking! And if not by strange men, by men who knew her and knew of her; how much more shocking still! Never could she bear to look in the face of any man who had helped to pull her out of the water and bring her here. Why, why, had she ever done such a thing? What were her sufferings, what were any sufferings she could have had to endure, compared with the shame and

scandal and misery of last night's wretched work? While she was thus racking herself on the torture-bed of repentance and humiliation, she felt a gentle hand on her shoulder, and heard her mother's voice. Vinnie hid her childlike face in her mother's bosom, and the two women had a long cry together.

After this Vinnie felt a little better, and gradually could talk to her mother and tell her part of the story, and have such of the story as she did not know told to her bit by bit. It was Mr. Romont who saved her, she was told; and she buried her head in the clothes again. She felt so much ashamed. It was Mr. Pilgrim who brought her in his arms to the rectory. Mr. Pilgrim was with Mr. Romont at the time. Oh! well, she felt relieved; she did not so much mind dear old Mr. Pilgrim. He was always very good to her, and he was an old man, quite an old man; it was a great relief to find that it was he who had the carrying of her in his arms. She could almost smile at that. Was her mamma sure, was she quite sure, that it was Mr. Pilgrim who carried her? Oh yes; Mrs. Lammas

was quite sure about that. Vinnie had Mr. Pilgrim's coat wrapped about her, and Mr. Romont's too; and Vinnie began to redden a little again at the thought of Mr. Romont wrapping his coat about her.

Then there came a gentle tapping at the door, and Miss Sabine entered. She sat by Vinnie's side, and talked to her very kindly and tenderly; not treating her as a penitent and a sinner at all; making no allusion, in fact, to what had happened, taking all that as for granted, and only concerning herself about Vinnie's present condition, and whether she would like to get up, and what she would like to eat and drink, and making frequent appeals to Mrs. Lammas, as if that respectable woman were the greatest authority and at the same time the closest personal friend with whom Miss Sabine could take counsel. It was all—"Don't you think so, Mrs. Lammas?" or "As you were saying last night, Mrs. Lammas;" or, "Your mother and I were thinking, Vinnie, that it would be well;" and so forth in the same way.

Vinnie was a good deal pleased in her

secret heart to find that Mr. Lisle and Lady Letitia and Mr. Georgie were not at the rectory just then. She hoped to get clear of the place before they returned. The poor little girl fancied she would be lectured and preached at and rebuked if Mr. Lisle and Lady Letitia were there, and she dreaded such a performance.

While Camiola was talking with Mrs. Lammas and Vinnie, a tap was heard at the door.

"Oh, it's Janette; come in, Janette dear," Camiola called. But it was not Janette; it was only Camiola's maid; and Camiola appeared to be surprised and anxious about something, and went out of the room.

Camiola had troubles enough of her own, as we have said already. Was it because of the difference between the nature of man and the nature of woman, the man more selfish, the woman less so, that Romont felt happy while Camiola felt unhappy? Or was it because in this instance the man's stronger and more self-asserting character made him see difficulties conquered where he saw

difficulties at all? The bare thought that Camiola loved him was enough to make Romont happy. Full of that thought, he had no place for fears or doubts. He felt sure that all would come right. Camiola saw nothing but difficulty and renunciation before her. She was positively pledged to Georgie Lisle; it was almost the same thing as if she were married to him. How was this to be got over? "It could not be got over," she thought; there was nothing but misery for Romont and her unless the time should come when Romont could have unlearned his love and forgotten her, and then he might be happy, whatever her case. But somehow she doubted if such a time would come. The very feeling of pride in Romont's love which would keep swelling up in her breast every now and then she forced herself to repress as if it were a sin.

Certainly Romont's short letter of the Sunday night had brought her great comfort. At least poor Janette was safe for the present; safe until her father and mother came back; and then, she hoped, safe for

ever. Camiola could not guess how this had been brought about; but Romont said it was so, and that was enough. She had full faith in his power to do anything on which he set his heart, and she felt overflowing with gratitude to him. "Oh, I may be grateful to him," she said to herself; "there cannot be anything wrong in *that*."

Mr. Lisle and Lady Letitia were to return this evening. Camiola expected to see Georgie earlier in the day. She was determined that she must tell Georgie the truth about herself and Romont. It would be cruelly unfair to him, she told herself, to let him marry her without telling him that she loved another man, and that the other man knew it. If after this he was willing to marry her—why, then she would have to marry him. Oh! how in her secret heart she longed to think it possible that Georgie might refuse to marry her! But she could not think it. She was sadly in accord with Romont in this; Georgie was so enfeebled and cowed by his absurd love for her that he would marry her on no matter what

conditions. The very conviction which she entertained was only another evidence that she neither esteemed nor loved him. "Oh, I almost despise him!" was the cry of her wounded heart. "I am going to marry him, and I almost despise him." Amid her other troubles she dreaded the coming scene with poor Georgie.

Janette was late this morning; but Janette was not usually a very early riser. Janette loved to nestle long in her bed, even on summer mornings. Camiola sometimes went to call her, and, going into her room, found her coiled up fast asleep long after the rest of the family had been busy in one occupation or another. As they two had the place to themselves this morning, Camiola thought she would let Janette have a more than ordinary indulgence. Still it was now nearly eleven o'clock, and that was rather too late, even for Janette. Camiola thought she would go upstairs and call the girl herself, so that Janette's extra indulgence in sleep might not be too much observed. Janette was not in her bedroom. Camiola rang for Janette's

maid. Another servant came after Camiola had rung more than once, and said that Miss Lisle's maid did not seem to be anywhere about. Had she seen Miss Lisle? No; she had not seen Miss Lisle that morning. Camiola's heart sank within her. She asked no more questions, but went herself all through the house and over the gardens and saw no Janette. Still it was surely quite possible that Janette might have gone out without telling her. Such a thing had never happened before that she could recollect, but it might happen without needing any special explanation. "I must wait a little; she will come back in a few moments," Camiola said. It must have been the alarms and excitements of the night before that made Camiola so absurdly nervous. She reassured herself by saying this. How ridiculous her fears and suspicions would seem when dear Janette came in! She was standing bare-headed in the sunny garden, and she had Romont's letter in her hand. She was re-reading it, to encourage and satisfy herself about Janette; for that and no other reason, no doubt; at

least, she would not have acknowledged to herself that there could be any other reason. One of the servants came out of the house and came towards her; Camiola hastily folded up the little letter and put it into the front of her dress.

"Please, miss, the young person and her mother are going, and they would like to speak to you, please."

"What young person, Sarah? Do you mean Miss Lammas?"

"Yes, miss."

"Then if you mean Miss Lammas, Sarah, why don't you say Miss Lammas?" Camiola asked, adapting to her purpose the words of Sydney Smith concerning Moses.

Sarah only muttered something about not knowing why, and in her heart was indignant at the idea of her having to describe old Mrs. Lammas's daughter, the girl who'd been a-drowning of herself, as Miss Lammas. "Miss" indeed! However, she did not venture to contest the point, for Camiola, with all her sweetness and her kind heart, was not by any means a young woman to

stand much nonsense. Camiola sent for Mrs. and Miss Lammas at once.

"Why must you go?" she asked. "I wish you could stay until Lady Letitia and Mr. Lisle come back; they would both like to see you."

"You are very kind, miss," Mrs. Lammas said, "and we've given you ever so much trouble; and I think we ought to go away now; and I have to go: but I thought you would like to hear that Vinnie is so sorry for what she has been trying to do, and she says she will never attempt it again; and—and, don't you, Vinnie?"

"Oh no, I am sure she won't," Camiola interrupted; "I know she won't; but we must not worry her, Mrs. Lammas, and I wouldn't say anything more about it, if I were you. I should like Vinnie—may I call you Vinnie?—to stay here with me until Lady Letitia comes back; it will be only this afternoon; I am sure Lady Letitia would like to see her—and I can promise you she won't preach to you, Vinnie; that's not her way at all; she is ever so nice with girls;

oh, so nice and sweet; I can tell you we have often tried her patience in this house, we three girls. You would like to talk to her, I know, and she would like to talk to you. Won't you stay with me?"

Now, if Camiola had ended this little speech by simply saying, "Won't you stay?" the chances are that Vinnie would not have stayed. But there was something irresistible about the appeal, "Won't you stay with me?" There was something in the words which established a sistership, a companionship, and to poor Vinnie's broken spirit was unspeakably touching and winning.

"Oh yes, I'll stay—if you like," she began, and broke down into tears, which she vainly tried to stop or to hide.

"There, there, Vinnie dear," her mother said soothingly, and with the alarmed air of one who thinks it highly improper for a girl of Vinnie's class to cry before a grand, rich young lady.

"Then come with me, Vinnie, and we'll take a turn together in the garden. Very well, Mrs. Lammas; if you must go I'll take

charge of Vinnie, and she shall be sent home, too, safely in good time."

Camiola saw in a sort of instinctive way that the one great thing for Vinnie now would be to restore her to her self-respect, and to let her see that she was quite free to make a new start unharmed by anything that had happened. The best stratagem she saw available for that purpose was to keep Vinnie to dine with the family that evening, and to make Georgie be very attentive to her, and to treat her just like any ordinary guest. This was not very subtle, perhaps, but it was the best Camiola could think of just then. Perhaps if Vinnie clung closely to Camiola, Camiola had in her heart a reason for being glad just then to cling to Vinnie. The presence of Vinnie would of necessity put off that inevitable explanation and scene with Georgie perhaps for another whole day; and even that delay would be something. Camiola would not put it off for herself or of her own accord; but if, because of the presence of a stranger, it had to be put off, then she could not help feeling a somewhat

cowardly throb of gladness, or at least a sense of relief.

The two young women walked up and down under the trees, talking of various things. Camiola had set herself to the task of drawing Vinnie out on subjects not connected with her disappointment and her sad history; and Camiola seldom failed in drawing out any one man or woman whom she took in hand.

"But you must call me Camiola," she suddenly said.

"Oh, I couldn't do that," Vinnie pleaded.

"Why not, Vinnie? You'll have to do it; why shouldn't you? We are only two girls."

"Yes; but I am such a poor, miserable, insignificant, ignorant little creature; and you are so clever, and so rich, and so grand, and all that—oh, well, so splendid every way."

"Nonsense; it's no merit of mine if I have money; and my people were humble people. I don't really quite know how my uncle got the money he left to me; it was in trade of some sort, I know, somewhere

out in South America; and oh! how often I wish he had never got it, so far as I am concerned!" For from some words that Romont had spoken to her in his passionate entreatings of the night before, Camiola had got the idea that he would have approached her with his love declaration before she had ever engaged herself to Georgie, if it were not for her fortune, and his unwillingness to seem as if he were looking out for money.

"Oh, I think it must be such happiness to have a great deal of money, Miss Sabine," Vinnie sighed. If she were a rich girl, her lover, she thought, would never have forsaken her.

"'Miss Sabine?' Vinnie! Mind—Camiola."

"Oh! I couldn't; or well, if you do wish it—there—Camiola," Vinnie said, bringing out the soft pretty name in stammering, pathetic, loving accents, and looking very sweet and fearful and clinging as she spoke.

"That's right, Vinnie," Camiola said, kissing the pale cheek; "we shall always be good friends, you and I."

The pale cheek got a little glow of colour under the kiss and the kindly words, and Vinnie felt that there could not be ever again in life for her the temptation or the despair which could make her do anything to displease Camiola Sabine. Camiola had never studied the way of bringing sinners to repentance; but if poor little Vinnie's one mad burst of despair made her a sinner, then most assuredly Camiola had found the way to bring her to repentance. Where is the moralist or philosopher of any kind who shall estimate for us the amount of good that might be done, or evil averted, by a sisterly kiss given at the right time?

The day was running on, and Janette had not presented herself. Camiola was growing more and more uneasy, more and more anxious to assure herself that there could not be any ground for uneasiness. That Janette could have gone away seemed almost impossible, after what Camiola had heard from Romont. That she could have gone away without a word of explanation or farewell to Camiola appeared absolutely impossible.

Yet Camiola could hardly listen sometimes to what Vinnie was saying, although she could not on any account have seemed inattentive. She did not quite know how the subject came up, but she heard Vinnie saying—

"You see, it is so different, miss—I mean Camiola; it is so different with poor girls brought up like me. It's no fault of my poor mother. She had to work so hard for herself and for me that she couldn't be always looking after me; and that's the way with ever so many girls; and so we get ways of our own, and we are women before our time. It's so different with well-brought up young ladies—like Miss Lisle, now. They are never left to themselves; they are always sheltered from the world, and looked after, and cared for; and they don't follow every foolish impulse; their home is all in all to them."

And just at that moment a servant came up and put a letter into Camiola's hand, and Camiola saw that it was in Janette Lisle's writing. Yes, it was from Janette, and it

bore the Charing Cross post-mark; and before she had time to open it Camiola knew only too well the news it was to tell her.

This is what Janette wrote:—

"My own dearest Camiola,

"Don't be very, very angry with me. Walter and I are going to be married. We could not live without each other, and he thought it best to make our marriage certain before we told my father and mother of our love and our resolve. Please tell them, Camiola dear; and tell them the moment I am married I will write to them and explain all and ask their pardon. I should like you to tell them this, for you can put things so well, and they have such confidence in you. I wish I could ask you to say you think we are right in what we are doing; but I suppose that would be too much to ask, would it? Only I do hope that you don't think us very wrong. I am going to be so happy with him—and he is so noble, so disinterested, so self-sacrificing;

he wanted me to give him up at the last moment because he is poor and cannot prove his descent from a noble family, as if that was not just another reason why I should cling to him and love him! You may be angry with me, Camiola, but you will understand me.

"Good-bye, dearest, for the present. With fondest love from your

"JANETTE."

Camiola had not thought that anything could have made her very glad to see Georgie Lisle home again that day. But now as she was reading the letter she saw him coming, and she positively ran to him.

"Oh, Georgie dear, I am so glad you have come; I am so glad anybody has come. Read that letter from Janette! And Lady Letitia not here!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

"STILL THOU'RT MY DAUGHTER."

IN all her distress and dismay Camiola could not keep from expressing some surprise at the way in which Georgie took the news. He broke out at once into peevish complaint over what he called Janette's selfishness. "She thought of no one's feelings," he exclaimed, "but her own. Just because she happened to fall in love with this fellow, or to fancy she was in love with him, she must sacrifice everybody and everything to her own whim. Girls are all like that, I do believe," he said.

"Are not men a little like that sometimes?" Camiola could not help asking him with some emphasis. The emphasis was lost on him.

"Of course I didn't mean a girl like you, Camiola." This was true. Complaints against girls in general usually include one's sisters, but it is a different thing as to one's sweetheart.

"Doesn't matter," said Camiola sententiously. "The question is now, what can be done?"

"I don't see what we can do anyhow; Janette doesn't give any address."

"Not likely she would, under the circumstances." Camiola could not keep from being somewhat curt and scornful in her answers to her lover. Then she remembered Vinnie Lammas, who had withdrawn to a respectful distance, and was looking the living picture of embarrassment. "Georgie, you remember Miss Lammas?"

"How do, Miss Lammas?" was Georgie's brief tribute to the social usages. He might be excused if he found Miss Lammas a little in the way just then, and he knew nothing about the event which made her a special object of interest and sympathy. It may be observed perhaps, in passing, that merely

virtuous conduct seldom makes any one much an object of interest and sympathy. We are far from wishing to bear too harshly on poor Vinnie because of her wild attempt to drown herself; but it is certain that the mere fact of her having been the sole comfort of her mother, if she were so, would not have induced even our sweet, pure-hearted Camiola to take so much trouble about her. Camiola, too, saw that Vinnie would be rather in the way just now; and there were peculiar and personal reasons why the deserted girl should not be a listener to any of the family discussions which were soon to set in. She turned to the girl with her frank and kindly way.

"Vinnie, something has happened here—you will have to hear all about it soon enough, I dare say; and perhaps it will show you that things don't always go quite so smoothly in houses like this; but you would not care to be here just now, I know. You will come again. I will walk with you to your house; yes, I will; I wish it. I'll just go and put on my hat. Georgie, I am going

to walk with Miss Lammas to her house; I shall be back in a few minutes—there really is nothing you and I can do just now," she said to him in a low tone. "We must wait until Lady Letitia comes; and the news concerns this poor girl more than you would be likely to think, perhaps. I shall manage to break it to her as we go along. It is easier for us to bear after all, Georgie, than for her."

Camiola had two motives in determining to walk with Vinnie Lammas to her home. One motive was purely unselfish; the other, it must be owned, was selfish; not darksomely or wickedly so, but still a prompting of self. Her good motive was a desire to be seen walking through Fitzurseham in open day with Vinnie Lammas. Some whisper about Vinnie's escapade would undoubtedly get about the place, and it would be ever so much to Vinnie's advantage if she were to be seen walking through the streets of Fitzurseham with one of the "ladies of the rectory," the very morning after the breath of scandal began to blow. Credulity itself

would ask for further proof of scandal after that. Cynicism itself would hesitate to believe the worst of a girl who had been seen to be on friendly terms with one of the ladies of the rectory. The other motive which influenced Miss Sabine was that by going with Vinnie she might escape a *tête-à-tête* with Georgie.

As she walked with Vinnie all through Fitzurseham, along highways and byways, on central thoroughfares and devious tracks, going entirely out of the direct road to Vinnie's house, and making, in fact, a regular promenade, she told Vinnie the whole story about Janette, and got much of Vinnie's confidence in turn. They met old Jethro Merridew, who took off his hat to Camiola, and made her a bow of grand antique formality, and they passed many acquaintances of Vinnie's, who stopped and looked after her, amazed to see her in such company. Camiola went in and had a talk with Mrs. Lammas, and left the mother and daughter in happier mood than they had known for some time.

Meanwhile Camiola could not help feeling a sort of admiration and something like awe when she thought of Janette's action. Janette, the dear little creature whom she had always petted and fondled like a child, to have suddenly done this deed of daring love, to have made herself the heroine of an adventure fit for the wildest romance! To think that an enterprise should have been undertaken in the real life of the present day such as Camiola had always believed was now regarded as too wild even for a novel; and that little Janette should have been one of the two performers in it! Come what would, Camiola resolved that she at least would stand by the girl who was ready to brave all for her love and her lover. Perhaps in her heart Camiola heard some faint, soon-repressed whisper of a wish that she, too, were away with her lover.

When she returned to the house she found herself ranging through the rooms vacuously, in the sort of way in which one ranges idly through the rooms which were tenanted lately by one whom the coffin has borne

away never to return there any more. What was it, indeed, but a sort of burial? The young Janette, whom she had loved and fondled for years, was gone for ever. The girlish days were over. Janette had a lover now and a husband, and the friendships were done with. So, at least, Camiola felt; not wholly unselfish, perhaps. Who can be wholly unselfish at such a time? There are jealousies of friendship as irrepressible, although not so keen and bitter, as those of love; and Camiola could not keep down the thought that Janette was lost to her.

The hours at last brought Mr. Lisle and Lady Letitia. To them the shock was at first absolutely overwhelming. It seemed incredible, impossible, that such a thing could have happened in that peaceful, well-ordered household. Lady Letitia set herself in her bewilderment the useless task of hunting through all the rooms of the house to see if Janette was not somewhere there. Even Camiola's words, even Janette's own letter, brought for a while no conviction with them. "Oh, it couldn't be; it is impossible!" was

all that Lady Letitia could say. Janette run away from her home—from her father and mother—with Mr. Fitzurse; it was absurd. Nothing of the kind could have happened; there must be a mistake or madness or something somewhere. Even Mr. Lisle was for a long time unable to admit the thing as a fact to his mind. After a while, when their minds began to settle themselves down to a recognition of the cruel truth that the girl had gone, it was curious to notice with what different expression the admission gave itself out. Georgie Lisle was merely impatient and fretful; he was angry with Janette for bringing all this confounded nuisance on them, and for coming between him and his enjoyment of his own love projects. Lady Letitia was inclined to be merely angry. Mr. Lisle was much more grieved and shocked than angry. He soon recovered his outward composure. He decided that nothing was to be done for the present; that no search was to be made, no scandal-stirring inquiries set on foot.

"You had your suspicions, you say,

Camiola?" Lady Letitia turned upon our hapless heroine. "You guessed that this was going on; you say you did. Why on earth did you not tell me?"

"I only guessed it yesterday," poor Camiola pleaded, feeling rather guilty.

"Why didn't you tell me yesterday?"

"But you weren't here."

"You might have sent for me. There are servants, there are carriages, there are hansom cabs. Why didn't you send?"

"I had a reason. I thought I had a good reason. I felt sure that nothing would happen before you came back."

"*I* knew it all along," little Alice exclaimed in triumph. "I gave you lots of hints, mamma, but you wouldn't take them. You were only angry with me."

"You run away, Alice, there's a good little girl," Georgie said. "You go play somewhere; you are not particularly wanted here just now."

Alice shrugged her shoulders and did not go.

"What was your reason, Camiola," Mr. Lisle asked, "for thinking nothing would

happen until we came back? I dare say it was a good reason. But can't you tell us what it was?"

"I can't—not just yet, at least. Of course, you will hear it, but I couldn't explain it now. It was a good reason, Mr. Lisle. I was sure Janette was safe."

"All these mysteries!" Lady Letitia exclaimed impatiently. "Everybody, it appears, knew something about this horrible plot but just the girl's father and mother. No one thought it worth while telling them anything. Well, well!" She shrugged her shoulders in protest against all the world. There are some very good women who can only find relief in trouble by the conviction that some one not immediately concerned is to blame for what has happened, and might have prevented it.

"I ought to have sent for you last night, no matter how late," Camiola said. "Of course I know that now. But I didn't know it then; and you would not blame me if you had the same reason that I had—well, that I thought I had."

"Did you hear something—from some one?" Lady Letitia asked.

"I did; something which made me believe Janette was safe."

"Did you hear it from him—from that man—from the man who has carried her off?"

"Oh no; not from him."

"From Janette herself?"

"No, Lady Letitia."

"In Heaven's name, from whom then, Camiola?"

"I mustn't tell you, dear; it does not concern me only; of course you will know; very soon, I dare say; but I can't tell you anything now.'"

"Do let her alone, Letitia," Mr. Lisle said. "What is the use of cross-examining her? She says she has good reason, and I dare say she has."

"Thank you, dear Mr. Lisle," Camiola said, her eyes filling with tears.

All this made Georgie very unquiet and impatient. He did not like the idea of Camiola having secrets. "Was any one

here yesterday, Camiola?" he asked, with trembling lips and jealous, suspecting eyes.

"Lots of people were here," little Alice cried. "Mr. Romont was here late last night, and Mr. Pilgrim, and Vinnie Lammas, and Mrs. Lammas; Vinnie Lammas was brought in drowned."

"Drowned!" the Rector, his wife, and Georgie exclaimed in one breath, all turning bewildered eyes on Camiola.

"Oh! she wasn't drowned," Camiola hastened to explain. "She is quite well; I have just seen her home—she fell into the river."

"She threw herself into the river," Alice said viciously.

"Well, well; she is not dead, anyhow," Mr. Lisle said, "and we need not go into that just now."

It was clear to the mind of every one that the secret Camiola was keeping had something to do with Romont. Georgie's cheek grew red.

"You didn't say that Romont was here, Camiola?" he stammered.

"Mr. Romont and Mr. Pilgrim brought Vinnie," Camiola explained. "It was Mr. Romont who saved her from being drowned."

"I think the world appears to have been turning upside down yesterday while we were away," Lady Letitia observed.

"Well, in the mean time," Mr. Lisle interposed, "we must think about Janette." He was beginning to weary of what appeared to him likely to become a purposeless wrangle, or little better. "We have to take things as they are. We can't prevent the marriage now, and even if we could it would be wrong for us to do. We must make the best of it, and have as little scandal as possible." It was indeed new for Mr. Lisle to admit the possibility of scandal of any kind connected with his household. "Of course, when this poor child comes back to us with her husband, we must welcome her—and him. We must take him as her husband."

"Could you receive him, St. George?" Lady Letitia passionately exclaimed. "Oh, I don't believe I could receive him, or even her."

In her anger Lady Letitia thought most of

the daughter's disobedience and mutiny. Mr. Lisle thought most of the beloved child's distrust of her father and mother, and of her deceit.

"Oh, of course, you must receive her and him," Camiola struck in with spirit. "Dear, darling little Janette! It was very wrong of her and foolish—why didn't she trust any one?—but what has she done that you shouldn't receive her? Yes, and her husband for her sake. He is very clever, and he is handsome and gentlemanlike, and I suppose he was afraid you would never give your consent; and, oh, they were lovers, after all! Dearest Lady Letitia, of course you will receive her and him; do you think I don't know you?"

"Certainly; yes, we must receive them," the Rector said decisively; and he knew quite well that whatever his wife might say in her anger she would think with him when she allowed her heart and her judgment to take counsel together. "We must do all we can for him—for Janette's husband. They will be poor."

"Janette shan't be very poor. That's certain," Camiola said. "Not while I have anything. She has been more than a sister to me, and I shall soon be twenty-one—and, please God, Janette shan't be poor—not if I know it." She put her handkerchief to her eyes, for tears of genuine delight were filling them. At last she found that there was some good in being a girl with a fortune. The words about her coming of age were flung with a sort of loving defiance at the heads of Mr. Lisle and Lady Letitia. They meant to say, "I know you would try to prevent me from sharing my money with Janette, because you are proud, and you think she ought to be proud—too proud to take it; but I shall be of age soon, and then I'll do as I like; and just see if my darling Janette will refuse a sister's gift!"

Camiola had to turn away; she could not keep down her tears.

Lady Letitia went to the girl and took her in her arms and kissed her. "You dear darling good girl," she said, and all her anger melted away. "You have been the

best of daughters to me, and I love you, Camiola."

The two women remained clasped in each other's arms, both feeling much happier than they had felt a moment before.

"Nobody cares about me," sensitive little Alice exclaimed, bursting into tears and running out of the room.

"Let everything go on as usual, Letitia," Mr. Lisle said. "We will have dinner just at the usual hour. Come with me, Georgie; I want to talk to you."

They left Lady Letitia and Camiola together, and it was not long before these two were conspiring together about the manner in which a welcome was to be given to darling Janette when she came back.

"Poor Georgie!" Lady Letitia said, with a sigh; "I am glad he is happy, at all events. There is one of the family at least on whom everything smiles."

Camiola felt her heart sink within her; but she said nothing.

Soon after she went into Mr. Lisle's study. She was one of the few privileged beings

who were always allowed to go in there. She wanted to say something more to the Rector. She found him with his head bent over his desk. He did not hear her. She went up to him ; he had one hand over his eyes, and Camiola saw that tears, actual tears, were on his cheeks. Be sure Mr. Lisle was not thus moved because his daughter had married a man without money or social position. He was not thus moved even because his daughter had married without his consent and against his will. Mr. Lisle had a magnanimous spirit and a brave, independent heart. What touched him to the quick was the thought that his Janette, his darling child, whom he had loved and indulged and confided in since she could call him father, had shown so little trust in him that she would not even wait to ask him "yes or no" before she chose a husband for herself. He always thought she loved and trusted him, and one day there comes a young man of whom she knew nothing, and he asks her to marry him and go away with him ; and she goes, and will not even wait to

ask her father for a word of approval or advice. It was this thought that wounded Mr. Lisle's heart and unsealed the fountain of his tears. Camiola understood him by a kind of instinct. Yielding to another instinct, she stooped down, put her arms round his neck, and kissed him.

Mr. Lisle looked up. "Thank you, my dear," he said; "you are a good girl. I was very fond of *her*."

"You will be very fond of her again; you are very fond of her now," Camiola said.

CHAPTER XXV.

A VERY SMALL DINNER-PARTY.

ROMONT slept long and late that Monday morning, tired out with the various excitements of the busy and adventurous Sunday night. His moments of gradual awaking were filled with some sweet, dreamlike sensation of happiness, such as men sometimes feel when consciousness is beginning to send its first soft light through the curtains of sleep, and which sets them to question themselves as they grow more and more wakeful, "What has happened to me, what is going to happen, that makes me feel so glad?" The vague scent of a flower, some light breath of the morning air, is perhaps the only cause of the joyous sensation, and the disappointed mortal has soon to confess to himself that there is

no particular reason why he should awake in gladness that day more than any other. But Romont had some distinct inspiration for his waking mood this morning; his first clear thought became a memory of the fact that he had kissed Camiola, and so bound her to be his wife, and that happen what would in the mean time this would be the end.

Then came the gradual growing recollection that all was not well as yet; that there were difficulties to be got over, the path to cross which it was not yet possible to see. Soon, too, came the remembrance of the strange scene with Walter Fitzurse and the compact in which it ended. Romont felt sincerely sorry that Walter had turned out so badly. He was sorry for Janette, with her child's heart and her enthusiasm; he was sorry that it had fallen to his lot to be the instrument to destroy her first romance of love. But he could not doubt that this was right to do; it would be a crime on the part of any one who knew what he knew to let the girl link her fate to that of one so destitute of all moral fibre and manly principle as Fitzurse had

shown himself. To prevent such a marriage, however, was all that had to be done. It consoled Romont and made him glad to think that it was still allowed to him to help Fitzurse to retrieve himself and strike out some new and honourable and successful path in life. Romont had no feeling but one of compassion and commiseration towards the unfortunate young man. The fact that Fitzurse had tried to kill him in the most treacherous fashion hardly now remained in his memory, and it certainly did not interfere in any way with his determination to help Fitzurse to become a better man. Romont was quite conscious of his peculiarity of careless toleration in this regard; he entered boldly into a recognition of it, and analyzed it and questioned it. "Of course I ought to help him, that's clear; but I ought to have to do so in spite of my hatred for his character and his acts; and I don't feel any particular force of moral indignation swelling up in me any more than I should in the case of a badly trained, vicious horse. It isn't good nature in me, I am sure of that; I am afraid

it is a moral pulpiness of character, a want of moral strength; but I hope it is partly because I am so much in love with Camiola that I have no room left for any other strong feeling of any kind."

The day wore on. Romont had not for a long time spent a day of such absolute lounging idleness. He turned over old books, and enjoyed a glimpse, now here, now there, into this literature and that. He was nothing of a scholar, but he loved books, and was able to read in several literatures in an easy, unscholastic, unpretentious sort of way, satisfying his own love of varied reading, and not inviting challenge or criticism. He had already been able to discover that Camiola, too, was very fond of books, although she hardly ever talked of them, or gave her friends to understand that she was a woman who read. He enjoyed much these hours of what might have been called enforced idleness. The enforced idleness came of a strong belief on his part that some one would send for him that day; Mrs. Pollen, or some one at the rectory—perhaps even Camiola

herself—and that he had better not be out of the way; and in the evening, as we know, he expected to see Walter Fitzurse.

The evening came; five o'clock came, the appointed hour; but Walter Fitzurse did not come. At first this gave Romont no particular concern. Fitzurse was not likely to be a punctual man in any case, and he must have had many things to see to that day, and might well have been thrown out of time. Still, as the appointed hour came to be left long behind, Romont began to feel anxious.

Seven o'clock! Two hours after the time! What could have happened?

He heard a knock at his chamber's outer door. "At last!" he thought, as he stood up. But his man came in and only handed him a letter. It was from Mrs. Pollen, and this is what it contained:—

"Come to me at once, my dear friend. I want to see you. Put aside anything else you have in hand, and come. It doesn't directly concern either you or me; so come."

Romont lost no time in answering the call. He left a message to be given to Fitzurse, if

Fitzurse should appear, and he went round to Mrs. Pollen's hotel. It was only a few minutes off. Mrs. Pollen lived very quietly. Romont was shown into her sitting-room, a small front room with a dining-room opening out at the back. The dividing doors were partly open, and Romont could see that a waiter was laying the table for dinner. Mrs. Pollen's maid was with her when Romont was shown in.

"So glad you have come," Mrs. Pollen said, "but I knew you would. You are always so kind. I am glad you were sensible enough to take my hint and not dress. I told *him* not to dress."

"I am expected to dinner, then," Romont thought, "and *he* is not to dress. I wonder who on earth *he* is?" Romont had already, in fact, a dinner engagement, but he had thrown it over, sent an excuse, not feeling by any means in the mood for dinner-parties, and not knowing what might turn up. He was free to take Mrs. Pollen at her word, and he knew that she had some purpose in everything she said or did.

"When I am told not to dress I obey," Romont said, "although it sometimes doesn't mean what it says. In your case I know it would; and anyhow I am always determined to take your instructions literally."

"About this Australian mutton," Mrs. Pollen observed; "it gives me a great deal of trouble, don't you know?"

"Australian mutton? Yes; I should think it would; it is excellent, I am told."

"Just as good as any English mutton, and so cheap! But here is the difficulty. The butchers in a place like Fitzurseham won't keep it, or rather they do keep it, but they won't admit that they do."

"No? Just like them."

"Yes; they sell it as English mutton, and get the price of English mutton for it. Now, what I want to do is to get the people in Fitzurseham to start some kind of co-operative store for the sale of butchers' meat. We could buy the Australian mutton in any quantity in the great London markets—Leadenhall, you know, and that sort of place—and retail it to ourselves in Fitzurseham at

about half what we pay for our own mutton. What do you think of that idea? Does it seem practicable?"

"Practicable? Why not? Of course it is practicable. What difficulty could there be?"

"Well, the getting these people to stir themselves to anything like co-operation—to anything, in fact. They would rather pay double price all their lives long than make any serious effort to get a better condition of things. Of course, I could start a butcher's shop of my own in Fitzurseham, and retail the Australian mutton there; and have good cheap bacon, and all that; but, then, that isn't quite what I want to get at. I want to get them to rouse themselves, and learn the way of helping themselves, and doing things for themselves. I wonder if *he* can really give us any practical advice?"

"I should think he ought to be able to put us in the way," Romont confidently asserted, not having the remotest idea as to who the expected counsellor might be, and wondering whether it would prove to be some phœnix

of butchers—some butcher of unique disinterestedness and public spirit.

Mrs. Pollen's maid was busy all the time arranging things on the tables and on the chimney-piece. Mrs. Pollen sent her out of the room for something, and the waiter had left the dining-room for the moment. She and Romont were alone.

"You know what has happened?" Mrs. Pollen suddenly said, letting the Australian meat subject go.

"I don't know of anything."

"No? Not about Janette Lisle? She's gone off with Walter Fitzurse; married to him before this, I dare say."

"It can't be; it's impossible!"

Romont jumped up.

"Impossible, if you like; but it is true all the same. I have a letter from Camiola Sabine; I sent for you the moment I got it. —Well, whether he can help us or not, I don't feel inclined to wait dinner any longer for him. We shall not put off dinner for the other gentleman, Adolphe. Serve it when it is ready."

The waiter, it need hardly be said, had returned to the dining-room.

"*Bien*, Madame," said the deferential Frenchman.

"Nobody is coming; nobody is expected," Mrs. Pollen said composedly, as the waiter again left the room. "The imaginary third person is a pious fraud of mine. It prevents any talk, don't you see? I don't want any one to suppose that you and I are in any sort of confederacy about this Lisle business; and I am not yet quite certain as to your part in it. So I wanted a good long talk with you; and I didn't see any better way of managing it than to order dinner for three, and let the third guest not put in an appearance, as he is pretty sure not to do, seeing that he has not been invited. Waiters get talking, one's maid gets talking, don't you see? When any one is listening you and I can talk Australian mutton, about which I am quite in earnest all the same. But when we are alone I have other things to talk to you about."

Dinner was served, and they two sat down alone. The plate, napkin, and glasses for

the third guest were allowed to remain, asserting the possibility that he might yet present himself. In the intervals, while the waiter was not in the room, Romont heard the whole story. Janette was gone—gone with Walter Fitzurse to be his wife.

"What I want to know," Mrs. Pollen asked, "is where he got the money? He came to me for money yesterday, and I would not give it to him. I guessed what he wanted it for; I had had my suspicions for a short time, and I would not listen to him. Now, when I got Camiola's letter it came into my mind that the young man might have talked you over. Did he?"

It would be idle to attempt to describe Romont's feelings when he heard that Walter Fitzurse and Janette had gone off together. At first he was absolutely unable to believe the story. When the conviction of its truth was forced upon him, he felt dazed for a while by the shock. He had never before been brought face to face with treachery and falsehood. He had never believed that such baseness was possible out of a melodrama or

a romance. His various and practical studies of life had made him familiar with most of men's weaknesses, errors, and crimes; but here was something of which he had never had experience or suspicion. An educated, seemingly well brought up man, who had all the appearance and the ways of a gentleman, to be guilty of such double-dyed deliberate falsehood and treachery, was something of which he could have had no previous conception, and in the existence of which he would not have believed even now, if it were possible to disbelieve any longer. He might have felt ashamed of the manner in which he had allowed himself to be taken in, but he really could not assign any blame to himself for not having guessed at the possibility of such deceit. One might as well have expected, if he were handing in a cheque at the Bank of England, to be paid in flash notes. A man could not accuse himself of want of caution if he accepted a bundle of notes handed to him across the counter of the Bank of England without carefully examining them to make sure they

were genuine. Just as reasonably might Romont have suspected that Walter Fitzurse was making a solemn engagement with the deliberate intention of breaking it.

"He did talk me over, sure enough," Romont said, after a long silence; "and I gave him the money, or rather *you* gave it to him by my hands. But he didn't talk me into any part in his plot; he cheated me, that's all." Then he told Mrs. Pollen the whole story, only leaving out any allusion to the attempt made upon his life, which, indeed, for the moment, Romont appeared to have forgotten.

"I have spoilt your dinner, I am afraid," she said.

"Not a bit. I'll pull myself together in a moment. Only for the first it rather takes one's breath away. So there are, then, real villains in actual life, not on the stage or in books!"

"Walter Fitzurse is on the stage, always on the stage, never off it; he is always play-acting to himself and for himself. I think he must be acting even in his sleep."

"You are right. I had some vague perception of that before. But to think that I should have been taken in by him, and should have given into his own hands the very means of carrying out his confounded plot!" Romont fell again into a deep silence.

Mrs. Pollen, too, remained silent for a moment. Then she said, nodding approvingly to him—

"Yes, that *is* the worst of it—I mean so far as you are concerned; that *is* the worst of it. You can't punish him in any way; you can't even expose him."

Romont looked surprised.

"I *was* thinking of that. But how did you know?"

"Shall I always have to explain the simplest things? I saw you clench your hand and pull your moustache, and, of course, I knew that you must be thinking of how you could have it out with him; and then I saw the expression of doubt and something like disappointment on your face, and surely it was no difficult matter to know

that you first thought of punishing and exposing him, and then you remembered that if he is married to Janette Lisle you can't possibly do anything to disgrace and ruin the child's husband? Are there people so dull that they could not have followed the track of your thoughts, knowing what I know, and seeing what I saw?"

"Well, that was what I was thinking of. We can't expose the scoundrel, if he is married to her."

"Of course we can't. If he had been 'slaughterman to all my kin,' as some one says in Shakespeare, I would let him go in peace and undiscovered, so far as I was concerned, rather than mar poor Janette's last chance of happiness. But I am so glad you see it in that light, too, my dear friend. Men are so wild and resentful and ferocious, so much of the brute or the savage in their natures, even the best of them sometimes, that I was afraid you would think of nothing but punishing him and exposing him."

"Oh, he be ——. I mean, what do I care about him? We must do all we can for her

sake. God help her; I am afraid she will have a bad time with him."

"Well, anyhow, we'll not make her chances any the worse. If he can by any possibility retrieve himself, we shan't stand in the way. You are a good boy, Bertie; as I said to you once, your mother has spoilt you very nicely. Well, I think now you may turn to your dinner again. Don't you like your dinner?"

"Oh yes; I can eat anything."

"What a pretty compliment to my *cuisine!* What a charming little speech! Even the food I set before you you are able to eat!"

"Come, now, you know I didn't mean that."

"I shall only accept your explanation on condition that you prove in act that you really do appreciate the cookery of this little hotel. What do you think of the wine? Is it dry enough to suit your corrupted modern palate?"

"It is beyond praise."

And Romont drank the champagne in a way which made it clear that he did not fail to appreciate it. In truth, he was equal to

a good deal of wine in his present condition of excitement.

"I am glad that you were not taken in by him in the sort of way I first imagined," Mrs. Pollen said. "I thought perhaps he had appealed to you as a lover yourself"—Romont winced—"as a lover yourself—why not?—to come to the rescue of another distraught lover."

"Oh, he doesn't know anything," Romont said hastily.

"My dear boy, you can't tell whether he knows or not. How do you know what Janette may have guessed and told him?"

"Janette doesn't know."

"Anyhow, I am glad you were not induced to make yourself an accomplice of his in that way. It is no discredit to any man to be taken in by a creature who gives his solemn word of honour and breaks it. Yes, I know you feel vexed because you were so easily taken in by him, but console yourself; I like you all the better because you were unsuspicious; and so would *she*, let me tell you, if she knew, and you were entirely

wrong on that point. Don't believe for a moment longer that she would be angry with you for *that*. She will think as I do, believe me."

Romont made no answer. The truth is, that he was just thinking of what Camiola must have said when she found that his assurance of Janette's safety came to nothing, and what she would say when she found that he had been made the dupe of Walter Fitzurse.

"Now tell me about *her*," Mrs. Pollen asked.

"There's not much to tell. It is just as I expected. She is angry; she thinks I played an unworthy trick on her. She says she doesn't care about me—any more, at all events. She will marry that young cad."

"You think she will?"

"She says she will."

"I didn't ask you that. I didn't ask you what she said; I asked you what you think. Come, I know very well that you don't believe anything of the kind. There wasn't a bit of the look of the despairing lover

about you to-day when you came in here. I didn't know anything about what had happened, but I saw no despondency about you. You are quite right. She will never marry him. Her reason will soon come to the rescue of her heart, and she will see that a woman can't be bound by the letter of a sham engagement against the spirit of a true one. That or something else will happen, and she will not marry him. All that I can see as clear as the day, and that is why I can't take your present condition as a lover too seriously. You love each other, and you will marry, and you will be happy; and in good truth I think you are well fitted for each other, and I begin to have a feeling of compassion for him—for that unfortunate boy, Georgie Lisle. Sacrifice some precious possession to the gods, my dear young man; you are having too much good fortune. As for him, the best thing he can do is to go back to the war and get either killed or cured there."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A LOVERS' WALK.

THE rectory was a dreary abode for some days after Janette's disappearance. No one knew yet where she and Walter had gone, but it appeared quite certain that the steam yacht which lay off the Old Ferry Inn had been brought there for Walter, and had taken Janette and Janette's maid (who was clearly in the whole plot from the beginning) and Walter somewhere out of England—to the Scottish coast probably. There was nothing for it but to wait. Lady Letitia looked miserable; the Rector was very silent; Camiola felt like one guilty of complicity in Janette's flight. She tortured her mind in vain to find explanations for Romont's letter, and the false hopes it raised, and false

security it gave her. She was thinking all the time what others would say of him if they knew what she knew, and, like her, knew no more; and she found herself defending him against imaginary assailants, and protesting that she was sure he had good reason for all he did. She found herself warming in his defence so dangerously that she tried to chill her advocacy by insisting to herself that there could be no explanation. All this did not help very satisfactorily to carry out the purpose which she told herself she had in view—to forget him. The effort to forget is in itself the renewal of the memory, it has been said, but there was something more in Camiola's case than the effort to forget. One cannot forget him whom we are forced to defend; one cannot be forgetting and defending at the same time.

"Let's get out of this place for a bit, Camiola," Georgie said to her one evening. "I'm tired of being shut in here. It's awfully dreary, don't you think? Let us go for a stroll along the river. It's very nice there."

It was a beautiful evening, about six o'clock, and there would be time for a long walk before dinner. The dinner was a dreadful ceremonial in these days; one needed to be strengthened for it by invigorating exercise and plenty of air. Camiola was glad to go out. She had been putting off the dreaded explanation with Georgie, and now she thought was the time to make it. It would not come to much, she felt only too sure. Georgie would never throw her over because of anything she had to say. Other men would in such a case, she believed and hoped, but Georgie was not one of these men. Still she felt softened to him lately. He was very dull and miserable these days, a sort of comrade in dulness and misery, and there was not much she could do to brighten life for him just at that moment. Indeed, it would not be quite the thing for any one in that household to seem happy while the father and mother were so much troubled.

"Mayn't I come too? I should like a walk," Alice asked.

Camiola was on the point of saying "Yes,"

when she remembered that the explanation could not come off if Alice were there to hear, and so she said nothing.

Georgie promptly put a stop to Alice's desire. "No, no, Alice; you can't come. You run away and play."

"I won't run away and play—and Camiola don't care for you one little bit, Georgie!" Alice piped in, with an utterly irrelevant assertion. "She don't care for you; she hates you. Oh yes, she does; I know it," the genial child persisted.

"That child is becoming insufferable," Georgie said, reddening to his ears. "It's a shame the way she is allowed to go on."

"She is sensitive and hot-tempered," Camiola said as they were going, "and she talks all sorts of wild fancies. But she has a very warm and loving heart, Georgie."

"Gad, I think she's like the rest of the family in that way. But you won't endorse what she said, Camiola?"

"Endorse what, Georgie?"

"What she said about you hating me, and all that!"

"Fancy my hating you! I have always been fond of you; as if you were my brother."

"Oh, come, I say; I don't want that, you know. I want you to love me, Camiola."

"I do love you, Georgie; wisely, but not too well."

"That's something from Shakespeare," Georgie observed rather sullenly. He did not perceive her perversion of the words or the application she gave to her misquotation. This would have been the right time for explanation, but somehow Camiola could not get it just at that moment. Georgie looked much too like a cross schoolboy to be taken into serious counsel on a matter of grave meaning to two lives. So she put up some other subject.

She kept thinking all the time what a pity it was that Georgie was not in love with some other girl, and had her—Camiola—for a *confidante*. She would have been so glad to hear him tell of his love, and to encourage him, and help him, and contrive ways for him to meet the loved one; she would never be

tired of hearing him pour out his soul, if it relieved him to do so; all that would be so delightful, and would make such a walk as this so happy for her. Why, oh! why hadn't he fallen in love with some other girl?

They talked of various things as they walked along. The path was now clear of the most outlying houses of Fitzurseham, and it was close to the river. They were walking in the direction of the river's source. Georgie began to talk of the probability of his soon having to return to Egypt, and this Camiola knew was always the prelude to an appeal to her to have their marriage hastened; and she did her best, therefore, to evade it or put it off. She felt terribly constrained with Georgie this evening; and had never before found him so small in nature, if such an expression may be used. If this sort of thing were to go on—if it were to be like this, she thought, "I should have to follow Janette's example in the end, and run away with—with some one."

As the thought passed through her mind Georgie had his eyes fixed on her face, where

indeed they were usually fastened. He saw a sudden blush cover her cheeks. Camiola stood still for a moment and visibly trembled with emotion of some kind; and then she went quickly forward again. Looking before him now, Georgie saw that Romont was coming towards them. Romont was alone and walking slowly. He did not see them as soon as they saw him. In another moment they met, and they all stopped. Camiola felt for an instant uncertain whether they ought to stop or pass on; there could be nothing but embarrassment either way. But Romont stopped, and Georgie knew of no reason why they should not all be friendly, so far at least as forms and outward appearances went. He had never particularly liked Romont; he thought too many people liked him, and praised him, and made too much about him.

Camiola would not have liked to meet Romont then under any conditions; but she was particularly unwilling to meet him when she was in Georgie's company. She did not like him of all men to see her thus parcelled

out and labelled as Georgie's future wife. She did not think Georgie showed to advantage in the presence of Romont. It came into her mind for the first time, and brought a sense of humiliation with it, that as they walked her lover was not quite so tall as she. She had never noticed this before, and now it vexed her.

Romont looked singularly handsome and manly in Camiola's eyes at that moment. She was becoming calm and composed, when she remembered their last meeting and his sudden kisses and his declaration that he had sealed their engagement, and she grew red again and glanced into Georgie's face as if she feared that he might have known what was passing in her mind. A few unmeaning words were spoken about the evening and the fine weather, and that sort of thing, then Romont said to her—

"I am afraid you must have greatly blamed me—about that letter I wrote to you. But I am not so much to blame as you may think. When I wrote I had the best reason to believe that all would be quite right."

"Oh! I am sure," she said.

"The worst of it is that I can't tell you all about it; I have an explanation to give, but I can't give it."

"Indeed, I don't want any; I am sure it was not your fault. I never had any doubt."

"Thank you ever so much; that is very kind of you; and like you. No; it wasn't my fault. I did it all for the best."

"I know," she said quietly. "I always knew."

Their eyes met for a moment—for such a moment! His look told of gratitude and a mind relieved; of love and confidence. Hers was appealing, pathetic; telling of a perplexed conscience and a troubled heart. "You have not blamed me; you have believed in me," was what his eyes said to her. "Oh, pity me and spare me!" was the appeal which her eyes made to him. Then he went on his way. Camiola longed to look after him, but dared not; at all events, would not. He turned and looked after them; sat on the wall that overhung the river, and kept his eyes on them until

a turn in the road withdrew them from his sight.

"What was he talking about?" Georgie asked, after they had walked on a few paces. "What letter did he write to you, Camiola?"

"It was about—about dear Janette. Mr. Romont heard all about her, and Mr. Fitzurse, and what they meant to do—on that Sunday night—when you were away—when you were all away; and he had a hope that he could prevent them; and he sent me a few lines to tell me so; but he was not able to prevent them. I don't know why he thought he could, or why he couldn't, but I did not blame him. He was very kind; he meant all for the best."

"But what business had he to mix up in our affairs at all?"

"Well, there was no one else. You were away; your father and mother were away; even Mrs. Pollen wasn't here; and he came. He and Mr. Pilgrim brought in poor Vinnie Lammas, and I had no one else to speak to, and I told him; and afterwards he wrote to say that Janette would be all safe."

"So we owe it to him, then, that Janette has gone off with that scoundrel? If he hadn't interfered, you might have sent for father and mother. Isn't that so, Camiola?"

Camiola was made unusually meek by the inward conviction that between Romont and herself they had muddled things a good deal, and that if she had sent at once for Mr. Lisle and Lady Letitia, Janette might have been kept from her mad enterprise. But she was much more concerned to vindicate Romont than herself.

"You don't understand, Georgie. It was very kind of Mr. Romont; it was mere kindness on his part; he had nothing to do with our affairs."

"Exactly; that's just what I say. He had nothing to do with our affairs; why did he meddle in them?"

"But he didn't meddle in them. I appealed to him for some advice when there was no other human creature near who could give me a word of advice. It was a very serious question, and I couldn't act without consulting somebody. All Mr. Romont did he did

for the best. Besides, Georgie, I suppose nothing on earth could have hindered Janette; she had set her heart upon it. And, after all, she loves him—she adores him; we must remember that."

"I don't call that loving," Georgie broke out. "I call that being selfish, selfishness and nothing else."

"Most people are rather selfish, I believe, when they fancy that they are in love," Camiola said sadly. He thought she was applying the point of her words to him, but she was not; she was thinking of herself and finding fault with herself.

"Anyhow there would have been a chance of saving her only for him," Georgie said angrily. "The fact is, Romont and that fellow were great friends. I dare say the whole thing was a put-up job between them, and that is why Romont took you in, Camiola."

This was quite too much for Camiola's not altogether habitual meekness. There was anger in her eyes and her voice as she looked at him and spoke—

"You don't understand Mr. Romont, Georgie; you never liked him. If you knew anything of him you would know that he could not possibly act the part you talk of. He has no feeling for Mr. Fitzurse but dislike and contempt; and he is not a man to take in, as you call it, any woman."

"You seem to know all about him, Camiola. Does he let you into his confidence a great deal?"

"I gave him my confidence about that because I had no one else to confide in, and he acted like a friend, and like a man of honour, and I am greatly obliged to him. And there's something else, Georgie, that I must tell you. I have had it in my mind for some days to tell it to you. I feel that it must be told; it wouldn't be right of me to hide it from you."

"Camiola!" He stopped suddenly in his walk and stopped her and looked at her with flushing face and trembling lips. "Camiola! —I know—it's something about us—about our marriage."

"Oh! if he should faint again, and his

wound reopen," she thought. But come what would the thing had to be told out now.

"It's this, Georgie; it will pain you, I know; but I can't help it. I told you long ago that I wasn't in love with you—that I was very fond of you, but not in love——"

"Yes, yes, I know all that—I don't mind."

"And I told you also that I did love some one else—that I was in love with some one else."

"Yes, but I didn't believe it. Oh no, it wasn't true. It couldn't be true; and even if it were——"

"Well, it is true, Georgie, and this is what I have to tell you now. The man I am in love with is Mr. Romont."

"That man! I knew it!" Georgie exclaimed, in an outburst of almost hysterical passion, forgetting in a moment how inconsistent this declaration was with what he had just been saying. "I knew it—I guessed it from the first. I knew no good could come of him and of his coming amongst us! But why do you tell me of this now, Camiola? What is the good of my knowing it?"

"It isn't the worst that has to be told, Georgie. The worst is that he knows it."

"He knows it—he knows it? He asked you—you told him? Oh, I can't believe it."

"He didn't ask me, Georgie, and I didn't tell him, at least I didn't know that I was telling him, or telling any one. He was near and I didn't know it, and I suddenly gave way—and, oh, I can't explain to you how it happened; but he came to know it—and he does know it!"

"Has he asked you to break off with me—to throw me over; to put an end to our engagement?"

"He asked me to marry him. He said I ought to marry him."

"Well, what did you say?"

"I told him I was engaged to you; and that I couldn't break that engagement—if you wanted it kept up."

Then Camiola stopped in her words and waited for what was to happen. Apart from every other emotion, she felt a morbid curiosity to know what Georgie would say or do. So far as the reading of romances and plays and

poems could tell her, anything, however wild and tragic, might possibly have happened. It was not off the cards that her lover might kill her first and then kill himself. Such things had been done, not merely in romance, but in commonplace real life. Such things were done every day. A week or two back, a young man, a delicate-looking youth, too—Camiola knew him well by sight—a shoemaker in Fitzurseham, had killed his sweetheart, stabbed her to the heart—it was by the river-side, too—merely because she acknowledged that she had taken a walk with another young man. Would Georgie try to kill her? Would he kill her? Would it not be strange, the sensation of being killed by one to whom she was like a sister for years, until just the other day? Did Georgie carry a weapon of any kind? Whatever happened in that way she would not resist. Let him kill her if he liked.

What did happen was something very different. Georgie caught her hand and raised it to his lips. "Oh! Camiola, how good and noble and true you are! You

would not give me up; you would not break off our engagement; you would not throw me over. I love you, I adore you, more than ever!"

"Shall we turn back, Georgie, and walk home? It is time; they will be looking for us."

She spoke very coldly; her heart was chilled. This was worse than the killing. She would have liked him better if he had tried to kill her, instead of thus pouring out his senseless adoration. She was shocked by his unmanly refusal to see that she was held to him only by the link of a mere bondage.

"You are angry with me, Camiola, I know, but I can't help it—and I am so happy to feel certain that nothing can separate us."

"Then, Georgie, do you really tell me that you will marry me although I am in love with another man, and the other man knows it; that you will hold me to an engagement in spite of that?"

"I can't think of anything but that I love you—I couldn't live without you—I won't

live without you! We can go away—anywhere you like, and live to ourselves—away from every one, if you like; but you must marry me. I won't live without you."

"Georgie," Camiola said gravely, "you make me begin to think that there is no wrong I could do to you or to me so great as the wrong of marrying you. I don't believe even that love like that would last. I take your own words; I don't call that love at all, but selfishness."

"Still you have given me your word—your solemn promise——"

"I will speak to Mr. Lisle," she said, "and Lady Letitia—I will tell them all."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE RETURN OF THE FUGITIVES.

VINNIE LAMMAS was in the rare position of having the one great ambition of her life gratified. She was private secretary to a great lady, at all events to Mrs. Pollen, who appeared great enough in the eyes of the Fitzurseham folk, and who would have been made ever so much of by the West End of London, if only she had been willing to accept the West End's attentions. Vinnie came every day to Fitzurse House and wrote letters for Mrs. Pollen, or read to her, or walked or drove with her. She went home late in the evening, or at any hour, late or early, when Mrs. Pollen was returning to town; and Christian Pilgrim was sometimes sent to see her safely to her door. Mrs.

Pollen never said a word to Vinnie about the plunge into the river.

Vinnie felt that her ambitious, long-familiar wish was granted, and that she ought to be happy. To do her justice, she tried hard to be happy. She made up her mind that she would get to be happy as fast as ever she could. Common gratitude to all who had been so kind to her called for that much effort on her part, she thought. She was glad to think that her mother was made happy by the position Vinnie had got, and by the improvement in Vinnie's health and spirits. Indeed, but for her own secret troubles, her disappointed love, her broken idol, her sense of penitence and shame for her one act of despondency and wildness, Vinnie must have been happy just now. Mrs. Pollen was one of the kindest, and at the same time one of the most interesting and original, of patronesses. Mr. Romont was in and out a good deal, and always talked to Vinnie in the most friendly way, quite as if she were a regular lady. Vinnie's sensations when she saw Mr. Romont for the

first time after "that night" were such as she could never forget. She thought how dreadful she must have looked when he lifted her out of the water and carried her on shore; what a frightful dripping bundle of clothes she must have been; in what untold, unimaginable disorder! She wondered what he must have thought of her; she wondered she ever had the courage to look him in the face. But he was so kind and friendly, so easy in his manner and so respectful, that he put her quite at her ease, and she soon forgot all about it—except at moments, except at sudden awful moments when it would all come back upon her with a rush, and she felt tempted to run out of the room, or at all events to hide her face in her hands.

It was very interesting when Mr. Romont came in and sat with Mrs. Pollen and her, and perhaps had afternoon tea and talked about everything. What things he had seen and done; what places, what countries, he had been in! And Mrs. Pollen, too. Between them they appeared to have been everywhere

in the world. Vinnie had never before been brought into acquaintanceship with a young man like Romont, who seemed to have absolutely nothing to do in the way of business, or of making a living. After so many years of poverty and hard work, seeing every one around her hard at work and nevertheless very poor, it was strange beyond comprehension or expression to Vinnie, to find herself the friendly companion of people who never thought about making money; only, as it looked to Vinnie, about spending it; who had no business of their own to do, but were constantly busy about the affairs of other people, trying to make them better and to keep them straight. Mrs. Pollen's absorbing interest in a scheme for a co-operative butcher's shop in Fitzurseham filled Vinnie with the uttermost wonder. To think of a great, rich lady like her actually making up her mind to start a butcher's shop of her own for the sake of selling good meat cheap to the dreadful, good-for-nothing, thankless people of Fitzurseham! And Mr. Romont, too, was going into the matter as seriously

as if he had been brought up to the business from his infancy. Vinnie always had had an impression that people like that never knew of the existence of butchers and their shops, and if they had known would never have allowed one moment's thought to such low subjects. Then what things they talked of, Mrs. Pollen and Mr. Romont! What odd, clever things they both said! How funnily they chaffed one another! Vinnie did not always catch the point of their sayings quite in time; sometimes she broke into little spurts of laughter at the past joke which seemed, however, to come in as the proper tribute to the passing jest. They must be very happy, she thought; and why shouldn't they be, when they are so good and so kind and so rich? Romont, we know, was not rich, and he had his troubles, and he was not always by any means happy. But no hint of any trouble of his had got to Vinnie's ears, and to her he was as rich as Crœsus.

Camiola did not come to Fitzurse House these days; she wrote a line to Mrs. Pollen now and then, mostly to say that nothing yet

had been heard from Janette. No one from the rectory came near the place. Lady Letitia in her heart blamed Mrs. Pollen for her patronage of Walter Fitzurse, and nourished a kind of acrid thought that only for Mrs. Pollen things might not have turned out as they did. Mrs. Pollen perhaps suspected the existence of some such feeling; and in any case would not have cared to intrude upon the Lisles just then. She thought she had better maintain for the present an attitude of neutrality. "I cannot say what side I may have to take yet," she thought, "if they hold out against Janette."

One or two evenings after the meeting on the river-side between Romont and Camiola, Mrs. Pollen, Vinnie, and Romont were on the lawn of Fitzurse House. Vinnie had a volume of Shakespeare in her hand, from which she had been reading to Mrs. Pollen, when Romont presented himself. Then Romont stretched himself on the grass, and Mrs. Pollen and he fell to talking in their usual discursory way, flinging ideas and

epigrams and paradoxes at each other, during intervals of graver discussion on Australian mutton, and the dwellings of the poor, and the difficulty of keeping this Fitzursehamite sober and that Fitzursehamite's children at school.

"I have often wondered," Mrs. Pollen said, "what are the most pathetic words in Shakespeare."

"I have thought of that, too," Romont said.

"I wonder what he has not thought of?" Vinnie asked her own mind as she looked discreetly but wonderingly at him.

"What is your idea?" Mrs. Pollen asked.

"No; I would rather have yours first."

"Well, I wonder whether any words ever written or spoken could have more pathetic meaning in them than those about loving 'not wisely but too well'? Think what a picture of lost lives and lost feelings; of love destroying what it loved, and all out of very love—'not wisely but too well.' Think of that, and of all it calls up with it in one's mind!"

"Yes; but what do you say to 'Perchance, Iago, I will ne'er go home'?"

"That seems to me terrible," little Vinnie ventured to say, "if I understand it rightly."

"Camiola always stands out for it," Mrs. Pollen said quietly, "that nothing can exceed the pathos of Antony's words about 'the poor last'—'Until of many thousand kisses, the poor last I lay upon thy lips.' Come, what do you say to that?"

"Oh, but I think it is enough to bring tears into any one's eyes," Vinnie declared. She was becoming quite the poetic and Shakespearian scholar already.

Romont seemed distracted. He turned himself unquietly on the grass. "I shouldn't have thought she would fix on that," he said at last.

"Why not, dear youth?"

"There seems such an intensity of love and passion and pain in it; I didn't think women felt so much as that."

"When? How is it that? Do you mean women in general—or this particular woman?"

"Well, there seems a passionate depth in

these words that somehow does not seem to me to be felt by women of a certain nature —Englishwomen especially. Some women seem to be rather lifted above that sort of emotion—— "

"In fact you don't know anything about the matter."

"In fact I don't."

"Who on earth would have thought that a girl like Janette Lisle, brought up in that kind of way and in such a household, would have been so carried off by her love as to kick right over the traces and run away?"

"I always thought there was something a little hysterical about her," Romont said; "something not quite healthy; something rather undisciplined; apt to be mutinous if any chance should come."

"I begin to understand you now," Mrs. Pollen said, with a smile; "I didn't before. Yes; I see. She is an undisciplined little thing who runs away with her lover; but there are nobler and loftier creatures compact of purer fire and finer clay who would not condescend to do anything of the kind, and

whose lovers are only all the more proud of them because they keep their love within the restriction of discipline! Exactly; you like the women not to show too much of that passionate depth of emotion and all that. My good youth, what an insular you are after all! But, I say, where have we left the Immortal Bard?"

Most of this was sheer mystery to Vinnie.

A letter was handed to Mrs. Pollen. She read it, glancing up even while she was reading, now at Romont and now at Vinnie. "This is from Miss Sabine," she said. "Our romantic wanderers have returned; at least, if they haven't returned they have given signal of their whereabouts; and they declare themselves ready to return. If all is forgiven they are willing to come back."

"Where do they write from?"

"From Bremen, of all places in the world."

"Of course; yes, I know," Romont said; "North German Lloyd steamers; they are ready to go out to America if they are not invited to return home."

"Precisely. The letter comes from Janette

—from Mrs. Fitzurse—so Camiola tells me. They are married; ceremony took place in Scotland. Then they went at once to Bremen to be out of the way of all possible trouble by pursuit or otherwise; and if they are not asked to come back to England they will go to America, and call in the New World to redress the balance of the Old. That isn't Camiola's phrase, mind; nor Janette's; it's mine. I mean it's my quotation from Pitt or Canning or somebody, and I am rather proud of the application of it now. It was struck off on the spur of the moment. Oh dear, these romantic young lovers! I declare I admire her immensely, and I only wish I could admire him."

Romont had risen to his feet now, and Mrs. Pollen walked a few paces with him.

"That child takes it well," she said quietly, indicating Vinnie. "Every day will make her stronger now. It is the doubt and suspense that kill. I don't pity her so much any longer; but I feel rather distressed about poor Janette. Can he ever come to anything good, do you think?"

Romont shook his head. "I am afraid not; I don't see the root of any goodness in him."

"Well, of course you will say nothing. You won't interfere with whatever chance he has of retrieving himself? Mind, my friend —for Janette's sake!"

"Oh, God forbid!" Romont said fervently. "For her sake and her mother's I'll stand aside. If he can come to better things I'll not hinder him. The thing is done now."

"Would you like to have Camiola's letter? I'll give it to you if you would."

Romont looked eagerly at the little letter. His lover's impulse was at first to take it.

"No," he said after a moment; "it's not mine. What's the good? It's yours, Mrs. Pollen."

"Have you any scrap of a letter from her?"

"Not a line."

"But you have written to her?"

"Yes, once; a few lines, as I told you."

"She keeps these lines?" Mrs. Pollen said, with a half-melancholy smile.

"I don't know."

"Ask her," Mrs. Pollen said, "years from this, and she will produce the letter."

The moment the Lisles heard of their daughter's whereabouts they sent a telegram to Bremen, and the result was that within forty-eight hours Mr. and Mrs. Walter Fitzurse arrived at the rectory. Walter had his wife and himself dressed in the most becoming way for a young pair who had made a secret marriage. It was a semi-penitential "throw-yourselves-on-the-mercy-of-parents" sort of get up. Walter had still in his pocket a few, truly a very few, of the sovereigns which had once weighted Mrs. Pollen's casket. He had spent pretty freely for the few days of the adventure; and if the Lisles had proved obdurate, he positively would not have been able to pay for the passage to America unless by the pawning of watches and chains and some of Janette's trinkets.

The returning fugitives were well received at the rectory by every one but Georgie. He could not keep down his dislike of Fitzurse, whom he considered a beastly cad; and he could not get over his annoyance with

Janette, because she had put the family so much out with her confounded nonsense. "I say. Janette, what a fool you have made of yourself!" was his tender greeting to his newly married sister. Janette only smiled. She knew it was his way, and she did not believe he really meant it, and she thought that all brothers rather liked to snub their sisters and take the conceit out of them. Besides, she was far too happy to mind what even Georgie might have thought about her.

Mrs. Pollen called and brought Romont with her. The moment was trying for Romont. He knew that all eyes were on him. Mrs. Pollen was watching him with a curious interest, like that of a spectator who is anxious to know how some person suddenly made prominent will get through a difficult piece of ceremonial. Camiola, who had not the same knowledge of the actualities of the situation, fixed her eyes on Romont with a different interest. She could not but think that something had passed between Romont and Fitzurse which, if she only knew it, would explain Romont's sudden intervention;

and she looked on with as much eagerness as if she might now get some glimpse of the truth from the expression of his face. Janette longed to see Romont welcome her husband with a truly cordial and friendly greeting, and she expected this and looked for it. Fitzurse came forward and held out his hand, and he looked into Romont's eyes. The expression was eloquent. It said as plainly as words could speak, "I am at your mercy; I know it. I deserve anything; but will you destroy me?"

Then Romont accepted the situation. "Over ankles over knees" is a sensible, practical sort of proverb—when one is in for a thing he may as well go right in for it. Romont did the necessary bit of play-acting and pretence with as good a grace and as much appearance of earnestness as all his practice in disguises and his skill in private theatricals enabled him to assume. He clasped Walter Fitzurse's hand.

"Fitzurse, my dear boy, how delighted I am to see you here"—emphasis on *here*—"and to give you my heartfelt congratulations."

Walter returned the clasp of the hand with a peculiar sort of little after-pressure, which plainly said, "You have spared me and saved me. I understand all your feelings; I give you my unending gratitude."

The minds of all the party were somehow relieved. There was hardly one present who had not had a more or less vague suspicion that Romont was Fitzurse's enemy, and could tell something dreadfully against him if he would. At the same time the common conviction was that Romont was a man who would not have pretended to any feeling which was not really in his heart. Therefore, when he thus cordially welcomed Fitzurse and warmly clasped his hand, it was like the verdict of acquittal by a jury of honour. Such is the value of a good character—such is even its oblique value, its refracted value. Romont's good character vindicated Walter, and Romont meanwhile was acting in direct contravention to his own principles, and making use of a good character to screen a bad one. It must be left to casuists and moralists to decide how far he was excusable

in this, or whether he was wholly wrong. Ought he to have then and there exposed and proclaimed Walter's falsehood and treachery? Ought he to have told of the attempt at robbery and the attempt at murder? Ought he to have thereby rendered it impossible for Walter ever to retrieve himself, and so made Janette and Janette's father and mother unhappy for life? If he were not to do this, then was he not justified in completely concealing Walter's past misdeeds, and so giving him a real and not a sham chance of retrieving himself? A formal reception, a chilly reception, would assuredly have left Walter an object of suspicion and mistrust in the eyes of Mr. Lisle and Lady Letitia and Camiola; would even have perhaps sown the first seed of doubt and distrust in the innocent heart of Janette herself. Could Romont make up his mind to do this? As well go in for a complete exposure at once. Walter Fitzurse starting to retrieve himself with the burden of common suspicion imposed upon him would have but a poor chance of making much way. Romont

could not make himself the means of spoiling the unfortunate young man's last chance. He clasped Fitzurse's hand, and gave Fitzurse his good character to begin with all over again.

A sudden revulsion of good spirits came to Romont's help when this trying little scene was fairly got through. He set talk soon going and kept it alive. Janette withdrew into the background with Camiola; Georgie hung upon their skirts, pressing upon Janette a certain unwonted tenderness of brotherly interest, and all the time acting as a sort of screen between Camiola and any possible approach from the general company. Never does a young man look to less advantage in the eyes of the young woman he adores, and who does not adore him, than when he is trying to prevent some rival from coming to speech of her. Camiola understood perfectly well what Georgie was about; she could have explained to him the meaning of every movement he made, and every position he fell into, and every step he took; and she thought him provokingly undignified and ridiculous.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LOVE-GHOSTS HAUNT THE CHURCHYARD.

WHAT was it that prompted Vinnie a few days after this to turn into the old churchyard? She had not passed its gate since the night of her attempt to drown herself. She had always felt a shudder come over her when she thought of it. Yet this morning, when returning from her mother's rooms to Fitzurse House, she felt drawn and driven by a curious phantasy to go out of her way for the purpose of taking one look at the spot which was so long sacred to her love and her happiness. She reached the gate, opened it in a half-fearful way, as if something painful must happen to her should she go inside; and she went inside. She made her way to the wall that overlooked the river, and stood

there a moment and re-called the memories of that dreadful night. The place was in solitude; the solitude and the sight of the water sent a chill through her; she turned away, and feeling weak and faint she sat down; just as she used to sit when she was waiting for Walter in the old days.

Now she was recovering from all that madness, she thought, and perhaps it might have been as well if she had not come into this churchyard so soon again. But she would have to see the old places, and she must be able to bear it; she would have to see him again, and to be able to bear it. Suddenly she heard the gate move, and she knew that some one had entered the churchyard. She did not look up; she kept her eyes fixed on the ground; she wanted to see nobody; if possible, not to be seen. The steps came nearer and nearer; it seemed as if they were now coming directly to her; and she heard her name spoken.

"Vinnie!"

The word made her tremble and start. She looked up, and with crimsoning cheeks

saw that it was Walter Fitzurse who stood beside her. Oh, what memories of happy, hopeful, loving days and evenings, sunny afternoons, soft, dusk, quiet, contented hours in the glow of the fireside, with Mrs. Lammas at her work a little removed—what memories like these came rushing upon Vinnie as she saw him with his eyes fixed beseechingly on her! And then what recollections of bitter disappointment and desolation, of cruel loneliness and the agony of waiting in vain; of pain, and madness, and desperation, and of that terrible night's dream; that moment on the churchyard wall, that wild look up at the sky, that plunge into the swift-rushing river! Out of that river she seemed to have come up a new human being. Youth, and hope, and love, and disappointment, all were buried for her in that plunge. Yet to see him now, and to be spoken to by him, seemed almost as if it could bring back the former Vinnie Lammas again, and torture her with the same misplaced love and the same cruel disappointment. He ought not to have come near her or spoken to her, she thought; and yet,

of course, it must be sooner or later, and perhaps he was right to get it over at once. She was determined that she would not show any weakness; the past was the past for her.

"Mr. Fitzurse!" she said, making a desperate effort, and looking up to him with dazed eyes which hardly saw anything, "I am so glad you are come home again. I didn't expect to see you here."

"No, Vinnie; and I didn't expect to see *you;* I turned in quite by chance just to have a look at the old place. But I am very glad to see you, Vinnie."

"Thank you," said Vinnie, rather blankly. "I am glad that you are well; and—and—I think I had better be going."

"One moment, Vinnie. As we have met —we haven't met, you know, for a long time. I want to know—I should like—I hope you have learned to forgive me?"

He spoke in a low, pathetic, pleading tone, and looked very humble and beseeching.

"I don't know that I have anything to forgive, Mr. Fitzurse; I think it was all my own fault. I was very silly; I fancied you

were very really in love with me, and that it would last like that for ever. I know now what nonsense that was, and how young gentlemen like to flirt as much as they can with any girl that comes in their way; and I thought it all meant something, and now, of course, I know that it meant nothing."

"Still I want to hear you say that you forgive me; I cannot feel at rest in my heart until I hear you say you forgive me."

"Oh yes, I forgive you, if I have anything to forgive; but I can't forgive myself quite as easily. I hope you will be happy; very happy, Mr. Fitzurse—all your life." The tears in her eyes were blurring for her all the scene and the outlines of his face.

"I don't deserve happiness; I did you great wrong; I don't know how it was——"

"It was all very natural and easy to understand," Vinnie said. "You had only known me, and you didn't know other girls, and you thought you—you cared about me; and then you saw a beautiful young lady—rich, and of rank, and educated, and clever, and all that—and, of course, you fell in love with her. You

couldn't help that; and she is much better suited to you than I could ever have been —and don't mind about me. I am all right. People are very kind to me; and I hope you may be very happy—and she; and please I think I must go now."

"I should have been very happy, Vinnie, if I had never seen her; I should have been very happy with you——"

"Oh no; no, no!" she exclaimed vehemently. "Don't say that; it never could have been; we never were meant for one another; I think I felt that, or I feared it, even at the time. You ought to be in society and make a figure in the world; you were made for it and born for it; and I am only a poor little girl, and I should have been a mere drag on you and a dead-weight on you—and oh! it's ever so much better as it is, and I shall soon come to be reconciled to it."

A thrill of keen and cowardly delight went through him. She was not yet reconciled to it—that was quite clear; she loved him still. He had come into the churchyard without the slightest expectation of seeing Vinnie, and,

to say the truth, without one single thought concerning her. He had for the time shaken off all memory of her, and his chief idea in entering the churchyard was that it would be pleasant now, in the pride of his success, to have a look at the old place where he used to hang about in his unsuccessful days. The sudden sight of Vinnie surprised him and roused his curiosity. Why had she come there? Was it because she was still thinking of him? This was interesting. He spoke to her; and from the moment of her reply he went on without any definite purpose, but such as each new word or tone or gesture of hers might suggest. In a few seconds he found himself playing the tender apologetic part of one who too late discovers that he has thrown a pearl away richer than all his tribe. Walter lived mainly for success in life; but, unfortunately for him, his power to play a part had a strangely incongruous and fantastic vein in it; and he was always turning aside to indulge in a mood of semi-sensuous and dreamy sentimentalism. That was the one defect which for his other objects

filled him with faults. For the moment it was nothing to him that he was the recognized and received husband of an earl's granddaughter. Fate had thrown Vinnie Lammas in his way; Vinnie Lammas whom he had tossed aside so heedlessly, and about whom half an hour ago he cared no more than he cared for "Sally in Our Alley;" and behold he must sit down by her and indulge himself in playing for a few minutes the part of the repentant lover who comes, too late, to see the full value of the love-treasure he has lost. He sat down by Vinnie and endeavoured to take her hand. He had no evil purpose; no deliberate purpose of any kind. Chance threw in his way the opportunity of a fresh and interesting sentimental sensation, and he could not for the life of him resist the temptation. Vinnie drew her hand away and got up.

"You are right," he said, rising also and standing not quite so close to her as he had been; "you are right, dear Vinnie, and I was wrong." She did not ask him what he meant, although she had not been offering any opinions as to the right or wrong of anything.

"I was wrong in attempting to touch your hand," he said, "or to sit near you, or to detain you here. We are nothing to each other any more, and should keep apart. We shall have to see each other, I suppose, but we must not meet any more; for I don't call seeing each other in a crowd or in a room with other people—I don't call that meeting. You will love some one yet who will be better worth your love than I was; and you will be happy. I almost wish I had not come in here to-day; but how did I know? There is a fate in these things, I suppose. Good-bye."

"Oh, Walter — Mr. Fitzurse," she exclaimed, "how I wish you had not come here to-day! Why did I come here? What brought me? I was getting reconciled and quiet, and I thought I was able to bear anything; and I was getting over the memory of that dreadful night. Oh, why must I think of it?"

"What night, Vinnie? What dreadful night?" He asked this question in all sincerity.

"That night—oh, don't you know? Oh, you *do* know—the night—the Sunday night—when I came here and tried to drown myself—flung myself into the river——"

"Vinnie! Vinnie! I never heard—I never knew anything about this. What night was it? Why did you do it?"

"I did it because I was mad, because I was in love with you, and you didn't care about me any more! It was only a little while ago, the Sunday night when you went away—went away—I mean when you went to be married to Miss Lisle. Oh, I was so miserable and so wild I hardly knew what I was doing, and I wanted to be rid of my life, and I came here and flung myself into the water—and I must have been drowned only for Mr. Romont——"

"Only for Mr. Romont! Did he save you? He?"

"He saved me; he is so strong and brave! Sometimes I wish he hadn't saved me, but he did; and he and Mr. Pilgrim brought me to the rectory, and there every one was kind to me. And Mrs. Pollen is so good—

and I was getting better—and I wish, Walter Fitzurse, that you hadn't come here to-day, or that I hadn't come. And why, why, why didn't you let me alone?" The poor girl fairly broke down in tears and hysterics. She was terrified at the thought of falling back again into her old love. She felt like some weakling lover of drink who has been doing his best to keep temperate and finds temptation suddenly thrust up to his very lips, who longs to be reformed and feels all his worser nature craving for drink, and who can only moan and shudder at the thought that if this last long enough the spirit of evil must carry the day.

She sat down again, and Walter sat beside her more boldly now. A sensation of wild triumph was filling him. Vinnie had tried to drown herself for love of him! That was magnificent romance! But one cannot have everything, and there was a bitter drop in the thought that Romont had saved her; that Romont knew all about him and his love affair with Vinnie; that Vinnie had probably told it all to Romont; that Romont

would remember how the very first night Walter and he met, Romont had talked a good deal about Vinnie and her supposed lover in Fitzurseham, and had not suspected that the lover was sitting there before him. Walter began to be almost borne down by the thought of the number of things which Romont knew about him, and the dread of his some day letting them all out.

"I hope, Vinnie," he said gravely, "you did not think of confiding to Mr. Romont, or to any one else, that chapter in our history which ended so strangely and so sadly for both of us? It would not be like you to do that."

"I never told any one," Vinnie said, flushing a little. "I was never asked any question by any one. They are all too kind and good to think of cross-questioning me; and I didn't know until after that it was Mr. Romont who saved me. I didn't know it until next day; and I never spoke one word to him about it. I never even thanked him; I thought he would rather I didn't—at least that he would think perhaps it pained me

to say anything about it, and so would rather I didn't, for he wouldn't misunderstand me, I know."

Walter Fitzurse was conscious of a positive pang of jealousy shooting through him keen as a physical pain. He was made jealous by Vinnie's evident admiration for Romont. "She is in love with him. They all like him—every one," was the thought. "Well, Vinnie," he said, "we must part. I mustn't keep you here. I am glad we have met again; and sorry too, I think. But we should have to meet some time, and it is as well we should have our first meeting here, in this old place—this dear old place. You do not love me any more, Vinnie. Why should you? How could you?"

"You shouldn't even say such words," Vinnie said, with some spirit. "You are married; you have a clever and a beautiful wife. You couldn't think so badly of me as to suppose that I could care about you any more—except as a friend, of course," she added.

"You will love some one else soon," he

said, watching her keenly. "Why should you not? Perhaps already——"

But the girl stopped him in her speech.

"Oh, for shame!" she sobbed, breaking down again in tears. "Why do you talk so? Why can't you let me alone? Fancy your telling me that I am in love with some one else already!"

Fitzurse triumphed in his heart. "She loves me still," he said to himself, "that is quite clear. Good-bye, Vinnie." He held out his hand; but Vinnie ran past him and out of the gate, and was gone.

Fitzurse walked complacently to the rectory to go out for a drive with Janette, who was pining for him, and was beguiling the drear time of his short absence by discoursing to Camiola about his gifts and his virtues. Fitzurse was made more tender than ever with Janette by the thought that Vinnie Lammas was still in love with him. The knowledge gratified his self-love, and made him all the more willing to be loving to his wife. He had, be it said, no evil purpose in his mind as regarded Vinnie. It would

have been of no avail so far as she was concerned; but in fact he had no such thought. He was delighted to think that Vinnie was still in love with him, and he was pleased that he had met her and had drawn what was really an acknowledgment of this from her; and that was enough for him. He would tell Janette the whole story some-time, he thought—a story a little edited in his own interest it would come out, we may be sure. It would be a story of hopeless passion on the one side, and heroic magnanimity on the other.

"Where have you been, child?" Mrs. Pollen said, as she stood on the lawn and Vinnie came up to her.

"I've been to see mamma, and I gave her your message."

"Yes, that's right; but what happened to you on the way back? Did you meet any one?"

"Oh, Mrs. Pollen, why do you ask?" She was frightened.

"Well, because I know the sight of your mother whom you see every night didn't

throw you into a state of confusion that lasted from her house quite on to mine. You have been crying; let me look at your eyes. Come, now; I'll tell you one thing you have been doing. You have been in the old churchyard."

"Oh, how do you know?"

"You have been there, and you have been crying there—I can see that; and I know why." Mrs. Pollen suspected at first nothing more than that Vinnie had gone into the churchyard to indulge in morbid fancies and unwholesome memories there. "You must not go there for a long time, child; until you have got over all this. It is not good for you to keep the past in your recollection. I guessed that you had been to that place the moment I saw your face." Then she saw another expression pass quick as a flash of light across Vinnie's face—the expression of one who has something more to tell but fears or does not know how to tell it. "Oh, there is something more, then? I have not heard all? You met some one in the churchyard —yes, of course, I see it all now. You met

Walter Fitzurse there. That is what happened."

"But I never thought of seeing him there; I never thought of such a thing. I wouldn't have gone in there for all the world if I had any idea of his ever being there, now."

"No, Vinnie; I am quite sure of that. I couldn't for a moment suspect you of any wish to see him again."

"Oh no; no, no," poor Vinnie murmured.

"But he talked to you; and he was pathetic, wasn't he? He spoke of the old days, and excused himself and all that; and rather implied that it was a pity things hadn't ended otherwise, and destiny and all that sort of thing."

"Why, surely, Mrs. Pollen," Vinnie asked with widespread and affrighted eyes, "you never could have been there? You didn't hear?"

Mrs. Pollen smiled complacently. She was right, then, in her guesses. The rest would be easy.

"I wasn't there, child, and I knew nothing whatever about what he said or you said;

but I have some experience of the world, and of men, and of girls; and I know what that sort of man would say under the circumstances; and I think I know what he wanted to get you to say. Shall I tell you?"

"No; please don't," Vinnie said, much distressed.

"Yes, I must; to show you what sort of person he is, and how much a matter of common form all this sort of thing is. Well, let me see; he hoped you would be happy with some one else—didn't he?—and said you would soon find some one worthier of your love than he had been?"

"Oh, how do you know?"

"Regular sort of thing, my dear child; might as well be got off by heart out of a polite letter-writer or sent about in circulars. Then he asked you if you hadn't already found some one to love; and then you burst into tears and made it only too plain to him that you hadn't. Isn't that the whole story, Vinnie?"

Poor Vinnie had to confess with renewed shame and tears that that was the whole

story; that Mrs. Pollen knew it all as well as if she had been a listener. Mrs. Pollen had given her a sharp and wholesome lesson. All that Walter had said must be in the common trick of such men—else how could Mrs. Pollen have known it?—and he was merely playing it off on her to amuse his own vanity.

"He is not worth thinking about," Mrs. Pollen said.

"Don't you think he ever cared for me, any time?" Vinnie asked timidly.

"Never cared, and never will care, for you, or any one in the world but himself," was Mrs. Pollen's answer. She was determined to call Vinnie's still undestroyed sense of self-respect to her rescue, even though she had to sting it into action.

END OF VOL. II.

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